Living under the Sun

Examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth

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The thesis, motivated by the difficulties that OT wisdom presents to OT theology, analyses the worldviews of Proverbs and Qoheleth and identifies the socio-economic realities from which these stem, in order to understand the relationship between them. The examination concentrates on the Masoretic form of these books, attempting to analyse them along the lines of the editorial intention: Proverbs is looked upon as having a single voice, Qoheleth as representing two voices. The analysis opens with a discussion of the enterprise that produced the two books, and an attempt is made to identify the basic framework and the aims that characterise it. The worldviews are then formulated under five categories of epistemology, cosmology, theology, anthropology and social perspective, with the practical outworking of these worldviews examined subsequently. Also, some implications of the analysis for the questions of historical development and *Sitz im Leben* of the books are pointed out.

The examination reveals a complex relationship between the two books. It is shown that Proverbs and Qoheleth proper stem from the same tradition of thought, sharing identical aims and using similar methodology, while, in contrast, the voice of the epilogue is shown to originate in a different intellectual milieu. At the same time, significant differences are found under each of the five categories. Both books build on the assumption of objectivity and uniformity of human experience, but Proverbs uses this premise to apply past communal experience to the present and future, while Qoheleth uses it to justify application of present personal experience to both the future and the past. Further, the proverbial understanding is theoretically centred around one God, but in practical terms the cosmological framework is dualistic; Qoheleth's perspective is strictly monotheistic. Neither the Proverbial Yahwism nor Qoheleth's theology, in contrast to the epilogue of Qoheleth, stem directly from the Israelite cult, and they employ different approaches to handling the cultic issues, pointing to a different stage in the relationship between wisdom and the cult. The two anthropologies also differ, with Proverbs having a significantly higher and overall more positive view of humanity.

The examination further reveals that the socio-economic backgrounds of the two books are radically different. The proverbial world is one of a small and economically independent community with family as the principal socio-economic unit, and the basic proverbial perspective is likely to date back before the emergence of the Israelite monarchy. In contrast, Qoheleth's world reflects an established imperial set up corresponding well with the common linguistic date in the Hellenistic period. These socio-economic differences are the principal reason why the worldviews of the two books diverge in spite of building upon similar initial premises. This makes it difficult to treat Proverbs and Qoheleth in a simple synchronic fashion and calls for a new approach from the OT theologian.

I hereby declare that this thesis was composed by myself and the work contained in it is my own and of no other.

Edinburgh, 21 August 2000

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Literary Sources

BDB	Brown (1979)
BHS	Elliger (1990)
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quartely Monograph Series
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica - Old Testament series
HAR	Hebrew Annual Review
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IBS	Irish Biblical Studies
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JAS	Jastrow (1996)
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	JSOT Supplement Series
JSP	Journal for the Study of Pseudoepigrapha
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
Joü	Joüon (1993)
KBL^2	Koehler (1985)
KBL^3	Koehler (1994)
L&S	Liddell (1940)

NIV	New International Version
RB	Revue Biblique
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Masoretic Studies
SBTh	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJOT	Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
TWOT	Harris (1980)
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
UF	Ugarit-Forschungen
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTS	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum alten und neuen Testament
WOC	Waltke (1990)
WTS	Westminster Theological Seminary morphological database to BHS
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

Textual Witnesses

𝔐	Masoretic Text
L	Leningrad Codex
𝔊	Septuaginta
$\mathfrak{G}^{O}$	Origen's recension of Septuagint
𝔗	Targume
𝔖	Peshita
𝔠	Cairo Geniza Texts
𝔙	Vulgate
α'	Aquila
θ'	Theodotion
σ'	Symmanchus
Amen.	The Instruction of Amenemopet

Other Abbreviations Used

ANE	Ancient Near East
BH	Biblical Hebrew

cs.	Construct form
EBH	Early Biblical Hebrew
fs	Feminine singular
impv.	Imperative
inf.	Infinitive
infa.	Infinitive absolute
infc.	Infinitive construct
K	Ketib
LBH	Late Biblical Hebrew
MH	Mishnaic Hebrew
ms	Masculine singular
pass.	Passive
pl.	Plural
ptc.	Participle
Px	Prefix conjugation
Q	Qere
sfx	Suffix
sg.	Singular
Sx	Suffix conjugation

INTRODUCTION

My interest in OT wisdom literature and its implications for OT theology was sparked during my time at Regent College by Professor Waltke (who was at the time working on his commentary on Proverbs). In the spring of 1995, I was asked to prepare a paper on the topic *Is Ecclesiastes a deconstruction of the Book of Proverbs?* for a seminar centred around the latter book. I soon came to realise that the question could not be properly answered without extensive exegetical work for which I was neither adequately equipped at the time, nor would the few weeks I had to prepare the paper allow it. Nevertheless, the seminars were fruitful and stimulating; two questions remained with me after the discussions of that term: how do the individual OT wisdom texts relate to each other, and, what is their significance for OT theology. It is these two questions that form the background of the present work.

Wisdom and Theology

When the similarity of Prov 22:17ff with the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope* came to light in the early 1920s, it triggered scholarly interest in biblical wisdom, until then standing on the periphery of OT studies. The surge in wisdom research reached serious proportions after World War II, so that it is now possible to speak of wisdom studies as a specialised discipline.[1] Yet, its impact on theological

[1] It is not my intention to present a complete and exhaustive survey of the present state of the study of Proverbs and Qoheleth here, and even less of the whole of wisdom. Such overviews can be readily found elsewhere, and there is no need to repeat what others have done with great skill and lucidity. For the Book of Proverbs, a superb and exhaustive overview of the academic research can be found in

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deliberation has been rather limited. Often, wisdom is almost completely ignored by the theologian, and even scholars who pay greater attention to it have major difficulties when it comes to giving it a place in their overall OT theology. To mention only a few, Eichrodt's massive work (1967, published in German 1933) dedicates to wisdom a mere dozen pages, Vos (1973, first published 1948) ignores wisdom literature altogether, and recent works by Childs (1985, 1992) allocate to wisdom books fewer than three pages without actually seriously considering the real theological significance of wisdom texts.[2] The most significant effort to date to give wisdom a legitimate place in OT theology remains that of von Rad (1962, 1972), who felt the need to return to wisdom in a separate volume after publishing his OT theology. Yet, while this volume is an extensive treatment of OT wisdom *per se*, wisdom still does not fit logically into von Rad's theological framework.

The source of the theologians' difficulties is twofold. The first one is related to a wider problem of OT theology and its methodology, namely, the question whether there is a single key concept around which OT theology could be organised, and if so, what it is; the number of such pivotal ideas proposed in the past speaks for itself. The details of the discussion surrounding this question are not of an immediate interest to this study,[3] with the exception of the fact that in virtually all cases the theological paradigms are built around the OT legal/prophetic traditions alone. Thus, the difficulties with wisdom literature, characterised by notable lack of interest in any of Israel's national traditions and only limited occupation with cultic matters, are easily conceivable.

The problem of certain perceived tension between wisdom and the legal and prophetic traditions of the Hebrew bible is by no means new; efforts to unite the two types of traditions are already present, as will be argued in the present work, in the

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Whybray (1995); for Qoheleth see for instance Murphy (1992); for wisdom theology see Perdue (1994), Martin (1995), Dell (1997).

[2] Childs is more concerned with certain questions about the role of wisdom in the formation of the canon, than wisdom theology *per se*.

[3] A useful overview can be found in Hasel (1991).

epilogue to Qoheleth, and even more clearly in Ben Sira. The modern solution for this tension most often, as has already been indicated, amounts to silently ignoring it, but for example Gunneweg (1993) goes as far as arguing that wisdom is a foreign body to the OT, centred around the Egyptian concept of Maat, which is irreconcilable with Yahwistic piety, a view which I reject. My own examination of the possible use of the Egyptian material in Prov 22:17ff leads me to the conclusion that the Egyptian concepts have not been accepted blindly by the Israelite sages, but rather both the content and the form were modified to suit the new background; the sages' belief in orderliness of the world is set within a Yahwistic framework of its own, as it will be argued in chapter 3.

At the other end of the spectrum attempts have been made to establish closer formal links of wisdom material with the legal and prophetic traditions. Thus, Wilson (1984) argued that the outlook of Proverbs, and in particular of Prov 1-9, is closely related to the deuteronomistic perspective. While there are some formal similarities in the language and formulations found in the two books, which Wilson lists, it will be shown later that proverbial Yahwism is a Yahwism of a very peculiar and distinct type which makes deuteronomistic origins of Proverbs, including Prov 1-9, implausible; an explanation for the formal similarities is more likely to lie in traditions and customs common to both the proverbial sages and the deuteronomists. A notable recent attempt to bridge the gap is that of Harris (1995), who argued for dependency of some of the material in Prov 1-9 on the Joseph story and Jeremiah, but the suggested parallels between Prov 1-9 and the Joseph story depend on repetition of very common Hebrew vocabulary, while at the same time the differences between the allegedly parallel stories are significant. Thus, in the Genesis account Joseph does not appear to be the innocent man of Prov 1:18-19, who has been ambushed without cause, and Judah's surety for Benjamin is a surety for a blood relation, not, as in Prov 6:1-5, for a 'neighbour'. When we take into account the fact that Proverbs offers generalised schemes of human behaviour, it seems more reasonable to conclude that the Joseph story partially fits the scheme than to assert

that the paradigm was derived from it. Likewise, the suggested parallels between Prov 1:20-33 and Jer 7 & 20 hinge on vocabulary that is very common with very little correspondence between the actual grammatical forms; the similar setting of the two stories, rather than literary dependence, appears to be a much more likely explanation for the observed common features.

While the theologian's first problem is largely one of methodology and, as Perdue (1994:34) pointed out, it is essentially external to the textual tradition, the second problem is rooted in the material *per se*. The fundamental obstacle lies in the fact that it appears to be extremely difficult to formulate an 'umbrella' theology for the OT wisdom corpus that would be comprehensive, yet, adequate. In turn, the lack of such a formulation makes it difficult to incorporate wisdom into the larger OT theology. Perdue (1994:341) captured it very well:

> Renderings of the theology of wisdom literature need to be written and refined. Regardless of the interpretative paradigm, articulations of the faith of the sages are necessary. Otherwise, the literature will not be taken seriously in formulations of comprehensive Old Testament and biblical theologies.

This problem is not simply a question of the 'centre of gravity' of wisdom thought (for Wisdom theology faces a methodological problem similar to that of the larger OT theology[4]). The real problem lies in the fact that the seeming naiveté of Proverbs, the disillusionment of Job, and the pessimism of Qoheleth, appear to share far less common theology than vocabulary. Thus, most of the present studies in theology of wisdom look on the individual texts in relative isolation without seriously dealing with the dialogue which these texts create within the OT.[5]

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[4] The three most commonly suggested centres of gravity for wisdom thought are anthropology, cosmology and theodicy. A fourth proposed approach builds around a diachronic shift from earlier anthropologically-oriented wisdom to a later wisdom focusing on cosmology and theology; the discussion has been well summarised by Perdue (1994:34-48), with whom I am inclined to agree that the most fruitful approach is in retaining a synchronic tension between the anthropological and cosmological perspective on creation.

[5] It can be further observed that often 'wisdom theology' is essentially the theology of Proverbs, with the other texts being marginalised. Thus, for instance, Zimmerli (1978) more or less reinterprets Qoheleth and Job in the light of Proverbs, and similarly von Rad's (1972) understanding of wisdom is based primarily on Proverbs.

The internal tension among the OT wisdom texts is often perceived along diachronic lines as the so called *crisis of wisdom*.[6] Behind this phrase hides the notion that the wisdom texts attest to a diachronic shift from a naïve and grossly inadequate perception of the world by the earlier sages toward a more realistic picture painted by the later texts. While I am convinced, and will argue later, that the diachronic element is critical to understanding this tension, the standard crisis theory in my view does not account for the textual data, and fails to even consider the possible origins of the problem. Crüsemann's (1984) attempt to understand the shift of perspective in terms of a change in the social structures is in my view on the right track, although his view that it is the exile that is the primary cause of the development may need reconsidering later on. The critical question is not so much what made Qoheleth and Job part with the proverbial outlook, but what made the proverbial sages take such a stance in the first place.

The above analysis of the two-fold problem associated with theology of wisdom leads to the following two conclusions. First, if wisdom literature is to have a meaningful place in OT theology, there is a need for a fresh start, that would include consideration of wisdom in the actual process of building the theological framework, as has been pointed out by Perdue (1994:19-34). As of the moment, at least as far as I am aware, no OT theology treats the wisdom corpus as material on a par with the legal and prophetic traditions. Second, it is necessary to move from considering the OT wisdom texts as isolated entities to examining the effects of their juxtaposition; without this larger synthesising step wisdom literature is bound to remain on the periphery of OT theology.[7]

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[6] Among scholars who adopted this approach one may mention for instance Crenshaw (1985:370, 1988b:51) and Loader (1986:8-11), but objections have been raised by von Rad (1972:238) and more recently Murphy (1995:233).

[7] Perdue (1994) has come closest toward the formulation of a wisdom theology. He carried out a rather careful examination of the entire OT and apocryphal wisdom corpus in its own right, demonstrating clearly that creation is a central theme in all of the examined wisdom texts. Yet, Perdue himself does not attempt any significant degree of theological synthesis, i.e., he does not formulate wisdom theology as such. In addition, because he concentrates largely on the theme of creation and its

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The Aims and Method of the Present Study

The present work stems from the need for a more synthetic view of OT wisdom just outlined. It is obvious that for the synthesis to have any real value, it can only be attempted after a thorough exegetical analysis, on the basis of which the different perspectives that these texts represent could be examined and related to each other. The present study is intended as a step in that direction, looking in detail at two of the OT wisdom texts, Proverbs and Qoheleth, and examining closely the perspectives that they represent: the similarities, the differences and the probable causes of these. The physical limits of a PhD thesis do not provide enough space to carry out both the necessary detailed analysis and the actual considerations of its theological significance. Since it is the latter that gave birth to this work, I will make a few limited comments and suggestions concerning the implications of the analysis for formulation of wisdom theology in the final part of the thesis, but I wish to make clear from the very beginning that the sole object and focus of this work is the analysis *per se*. At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the theological questions are reflected in the chosen methodology. Notably, my main interest is in understanding the perspectives of the books in their present shape. This is not to imply that I consider these books monolithic compositions each written by a single author, nor that the questions pertaining to the history of their formation are of little importance. In fact, it will be seen that the analysis of the present shape of the texts uncovers certain significant clues to their formation, and these will be pointed out in due course.

Which Text?

The deliberate choice to look at each of the two books from a synchronic perspective is closely related to the question of choosing the text. Since the biblical

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anthropological and cosmological aspects, he does not offer a sufficiently comprehensive formulation of the worldview of the individual books.

material is not represented by a uniform textual tradition, before any study of it can be carried out, a decision needs to be made about the identity of the texts that are going to be considered, as well as the overall text-critical strategy. Three principal options are open to the interpreter: to use one particular textual tradition, to use an eclectic text, or to use a text of one of the principal traditions occasionally corrected in the light of other textual witnesses. The choice is largely determined by the character of the material available and the purpose of the study. From the perspective of a theologian the former approach has the advantage of being able to claim close continuity with a community of faith that the text represents, but it ignores a number of issues stemming from the lack of uniformity of the textual witnesses. In biblical studies the third approach is the most common (although the principal text and the degree with which the resulting text nears one of the other two ends of the spectrum vary). This third approach will also be employed here. The principal tradition will be that of 𝔐 with the intention being to stay as near to that textual tradition as reasonably possible, but not to the extent of ignoring the nature of the formation and transmission of ancient texts. This approach should allow the claim of continuity to be mostly retained, without having to entirely ignore the reality of varying textual traditions; my principal interest is not in the text *per se* but in the mindset that brought it into being.

The details of the textual situation in the case of the two books differ significantly, therefore, the specifics of the text-critical strategy adopted here will be somewhat different for each of them. The textual situation is relatively simple in the case of Qoheleth. The versions in their present form appear to stem from the same tradition as 𝔐, and show serious attempts to stay as close to the received tradition as possible. Thus for instance in the case of 𝔊, the translation is extremely literal, even rendering the particle אֵת־ by the preposition συν, and further, where the translator did not understand the meaning of the Hebrew text, he typically rendered the words

as literally as possible, even though the resulting Greek may not make much sense.[8] As far as 𝔐 of Qoheleth is concerned, it appears that a number of common scribal errors entered the text as we have it, but often these are not reflected in the versions which can be used to correct them.[9]

In the case of Proverbs the situation is more complicated. The text of 𝔊 differs significantly from that of 𝔐, both in respect of the arrangement of the material and of the actual content. This could be due to some extent to differences in the translator's Hebrew Vorlage (Tov 1990), but it also appears that the translator took a great degree of liberty in modifying the text for stylistic reasons, as well as adjusting the thought of the book to the Hellenistic concept of wisdom of his own milieu. In addition, it is also apparent that the translator's grasp of Hebrew was somewhat limping, and consequently the Greek text is often a new literary composition rather than a translation. Thus 𝔊 of Proverbs represents a quite separate tradition, stemming from different circumstances and addressing different concerns, one that deserves study in its own right. At the same time its value for text-critical purposes when dealing with the Hebrew text can be limited in places, and it has to be used with caution. Since 𝔊 seems to have influenced the other major versions at least to some extent, equal care needs to be taken when their variant readings are evaluated.[10]

The outline of the basic text-critical strategy needs to be accompanied by a few notes on my view of the text of the two books from a more macroscopic perspective. Until recently it has been taken for granted that the sayings collected in Proverbs are mutually unrelated, to the extent that some commentators felt free to

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[8] This led some scholars to the conclusion that the text preserved in 𝔊 is not the original 𝔊 translation, but a secondary replacement. Thus for instance Gordis (1955a:126) suggested that the present text of 𝔊 of Qoheleth is the first version of Aquila's translation.

[9] Unfortunately, attestation of Qoheleth among the Dead Sea Scrolls is limited, but the evidence will be used for text-critical purposes where available; for detailed information see Muilenburg (1954), Ulrich (1992).

[10] For instance 𝔖 often tends to conflate texts of 𝔐 and 𝔊 although on a number of occasions the translator understood the Hebrew text better than the translator of 𝔊.

rearrange the material according to their own schemes.[11] However, this approach has been seriously challenged in recent years. Of the greatest significance in this respect is the work of Van Leeuwen (1988), who suggested that the literary context in Proverbs intentionally substitutes the lost life-context, i.e., the *Sitz im Leben* had been consciously replaced by *Sitz im Buch*, and, therefore, the context is a serious factor in interpreting the book.[12] The implications of this newly gained insight are far reaching — the whole is more than the sum of its parts. At the same time, this new perception of the book should not obscure the fact that the nature of the petty sayings is such that they have to be understandable in relative autonomy, i.e., the primary source of meaning in the collections is the individual saying. A juxtaposition of selected sayings can focus the meaning of the sayings in a particular direction (individual sayings are often open to a number of related, but not necessarily identical interpretations, and can be applied to different situations in life), or the juxtaposition can add certain additional nuances; there are a number of cases in Proverbs where this is detectable. On the other hand, as far as I am able to see, the book does not display any homogenous overall strategy for organisation of the material; it remains first and foremost a collection of sayings.

Concerning the composition of Qoheleth, numerous attempts have been made to date to identify a meaningful literary structure in the book that would aid its interpretation. The sheer number of the various schemes perceived by different interpreters would seem to point in one direction — there is no obvious and carefully constructed literary framework to Qoheleth proper (i.e., Qoh 1:2-12:8) serving as an overall guide to Qoheleth's thought. This is not to say that the text is a random collection of sentences; there are smaller identifiable units, held together by common

[11] An example *par excellence* of this atomistic approach to the book is the commentary by McKane (1970).

[12] Another, less detailed example of context-oriented approach to the book of Proverbs is Saebo (1986).

themes and catchwords and the analysis of these and the grammatical forms shows a shift of emphasis between the first and second half of the book.[13]

The key issue for the overall interpretation of the book is the relationship between Qoheleth proper and the epilogue.[14] While it is widely acknowledged that the views of the two differ, the theological significance of this juxtaposition is not normally addressed in OT theologies, and the theologian often accepts one or the other as the overall voice of the book. However, Sheppard (1977:184-89) argued that the epilogue cannot be seen as a simple theological corrective to the book's scepticism, but instead that it has a wider canonical function giving a singular focus to the entire wisdom corpus, and at the same time limiting its extent. Although I am not completely convinced about the latter assertion which Sheppard developed later on (1980), I agree with him that the epilogue is not a simple theological corrective. First, it should be observed that the epilogue thinks highly of Qoheleth and his wisdom, and it is thus unlikely that it is intended as an outright rejection of the rest of the book. This view is further supported by the briefness of the epilogue which makes it inadequate as a rebuttal of Qoheleth's views. At the same time, the epilogue is not a straightforward endorsement of the core of the book.

Wilson (1984) argued that the epilogue is intended to form a frame with Prov 1:1-3, which is meant to serve as a hermeneutical key for the two books, essentially to do with divine demand for justice and divine judgment with respect to fulfilment of this obligation. While I find Wilson's argument unconvincing at a number of points,[15] I am of the opinion that both Sheppard and Wilson are correct in detecting

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[13] This issue will be addressed further in chapter 1.

[14] The opinions of commentators on the origins of the epilogue differ; it is most often seen as coming from a different hand than the core of the book, but Fox (1977), for instance, argued otherwise. Further, it has been suggested that there are in fact two epilogues in the book, Qoh 12:9-11 and Qoh 12:12-14. This is possible in the sense that the two sections could have originated separately. However, no attempt is made in the second section to distinguish its voice from that of the earlier portion. Thus, on the literary level, the entire epilogue represents a single voice.

[15] I have already expressed reservations about the claims of deuteronomistic origins of Prov 1-9 and without it the implicit reference of the epilogue to Proverbs is untenable. Overall, Wilson in my view fails to appreciate the fundamental difference between the perspective of the epilogist on the one hand

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in the epilogue what might be called canonical forces, by which I mean evidence of attempts to bring together traditions that are quite different from each other, namely wisdom and the traditions that revolve around the cult.

The text indicates clearly by the shift from first person to third person references to the persona of Qoheleth that the two voices are to be seen as distinct from each other. Thus, in the following chapters, I will treat the two voices of Qoheleth and the epilogist as voices in their own right without attempting to find a composite reading of them; only in the final part of this work will I make some limited comments on the implications of the differences between the two voices for understanding of the book.[16]

Examining the Worldviews

Having explained the basic approach to the textual tradition adopted in the present study, I wish to outline the way in which the analysis of the text will be carried out. The intention is to formulate a comprehensive worldview for each of the two books; by *worldview* I mean an overall and comprehensive set of beliefs about the world and one's place in it which informs, if not dictates, one's behaviour. I have decided to use the term *worldview* quite deliberately. It is common in biblical studies to speak of *theology* of a book when referring to its overall perspective. Although I have used the term this way so far, e.g., referring to *theology of wisdom*, I do not find the terminology entirely satisfactory, partly because sometimes it is necessary to speak of theology in a narrower sense of views concerning God, partly because I feel that using the term in the broad and loose sense does in fact prejudice the enquiry by forcing theological issues where none might be present. In my view neither Proverbs,

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and both the views of Proverbs and Qoheleth on the other, a difference which I will attempt to demonstrate in due course.

[16] For a recent extensive treatment of the epilogue and various interpretative issues see Christianson (1998:96-114).

nor Qoheleth are principally theological works; they have to *reckon with* theology, but they are not *about* theology.

Since, as I have also already indicated, my primary interest at this moment is in the synchronic voice of each of the two books, the examination of the worldviews will be carried out along the lines of the intentions detectable in the composition of the books. In considering the worldview of Proverbs, the book will be treated as speaking with a single voice (or several voices in harmony), for this appears to have been the editorial intention.[17] Where Qoheleth is concerned, the situation is rather different. As it has been pointed out, the voice that speaks in the epilogue expresses views that appear to be different and independent from those of Qoheleth proper, and consequently, I will be looking for two separate worldviews where that is possible.[18]

The key methodological issue is how to formulate the worldviews of the two books. First of all, it is important that the perspectives of the two texts are examined and expressed in terms that are native to them, rather than using concepts that are borrowed from other OT traditions. In addition, there are two conflicting requirements on the formulation itself. On the one hand, it has to be sufficiently comprehensive, i.e., the formulation should cover all the essential issues that the texts are concerned with, for failure to do so would call into serious question the general validity of the conclusions reached. On the other hand, the formulation must allow a reasonably transparent comparison of the two worldviews. This requires that the discussion is limited to a relatively small number of clearly defined issues, for too large a number of categories would necessarily lead to a fragmentation of the overall picture. Also, since the ultimate aim of the study is to relate the two worldviews to each other, in deciding what the key issues in the two books are, relative rather than absolute significance has to be considered. What may appear to be a major issue in

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[17] Quite apart from the editorial intention, it will be seen in due course that there are no wide and far-reaching differences in the perspectives advocated by the separate sections of the book.

[18] Due to the brevity of the epilogue it will not be possible to formulate a complete worldview of the epilogist, but only some of its elements. However, since, by the nature of the text, these will be the points where the two worldviews differ most significantly, the partiality will be of lesser importance.

one book, may not appear so in the other. Yet, from the point of view of the comparison, an absence or near absence of a particular issue from one of the worldviews might be just as revealing, and therefore significant, as an emphasis would be. Therefore, the issues considered for each book must be the union, in the mathematical sense of the word, of the key concerns of the two texts.

For practical reasons, it is useful to draw a distinction between the cognitive part of a worldview, i.e., what a person thinks of the world, and its practical element, i.e., how in practical terms this cognitive perspective projects itself into the person's behaviour; both Proverbs and Qoheleth have the latter of these in mind, and to some extent I will be attempting to derive the abstract perspectives from the practical ones.

In the case of Proverbs, a distinction can be made between three main types of conduct that the book addresses: behaviour within the context of human relationships, behaviour within the context of relationship with God, and, occasionally, behaviour with consequences largely limited to the self. Thus, it is necessary to examine the proverbial social and anthropological views, including the sages' ethics,[19] and the book's theological perspective. Closely related to the latter is the larger cosmological framework that the text represents, and material with implicit or explicit cosmological implications is scattered all over the book. It is, therefore, necessary to look also at the larger cosmological framework. Further, we have to appreciate that Proverbs is not simply a rule book, but that the desired behaviour is an informed one, as is shown by the high concentration of cognitive vocabulary throughout. This fact requires that we also examine the sages' epistemology.

Turning to the latter book, the types of behaviour that Qoheleth examines fit under the same three rubrics used above, although the mutual proportions of these are different, and the behavioural considerations are mainly from the perspective of an impact on the self, so that the term ethics can be used with reference to the book

[19] Throughout this work I will use the term *ethics* with the very basic sense of system of values that governs the way how a person's behaviour is, or should be, affected by the presence, needs or interests of other people.

only with caution. Similarly to Proverbs, the book is also interested in an informed behaviour, as is shown by the frequent occurrence of the root ידע, so that the question of epistemology is no less important. As far as the epilogue of Qoheleth is concerned, some significant aspects of the epilogist's worldview are implied in spite of its brevity. Thus, his comments about Qoheleth, his work and the wisdom enterprise in general reveal certain views concerning knowledge, the process through which it is acquired and its value. Further, all of these comments show a certain theological perspective that informs the epilogist's epistemology, and offer insight into the code for proper behaviour to which he adheres.

Overall, the cognitive element of the worldviews that we find in these books can be formulated under the categories of epistemology, theology, cosmology, anthropology and sociology; I am not aware of any other issues that appear in these two books that could not be treated under one of these five rubrics. The two books will be discussed under these in chapters 2-4, and in chapter 5 I will present a summary of the practical code of conduct that the two books derive from their respective understandings of the world.

One of the potential dangers of treating the two books merely under the five isolated rubrics is losing the sense of the overall picture. In order to avoid this, the detailed analysis of the worldviews of the two books in chapters 2-5 is preceded by a chapter that presents a more coherent, albeit only sketchy, image of what is happening in the two books, the concerns they stem from, the questions they address, and the ways they go about doing so. The detailed discussion of the individual aspects of the two worldviews in chapters 2-5 should be understood as always having an implied reference to this overall framework.

One final issue needs to be mentioned. In order to argue the case, it is necessary to quote the text of Proverbs and Qoheleth frequently. Some of the material used has a direct bearing on discussion of several different aspects of the worldview, and will, therefore, figure several times in the text. For the sake of the

reader it was deemed more practical to repeat such passages, rather than back-reference them. However, the textual notes that accompany these are included only once. This is normally on the first occurrence of the given material, except for situations where a shorter piece of text is used in one place, but the same text is found later within a larger quote. In such cases the textual notes accompany the larger text. In all cases, however, appropriate page references are given. It should be further noted that for reasons of physical space the textcritical notes are not fully exhaustive, and textual variants that were deemed not to be of any real interest for the purposes of the study are not discussed. The grammatical terminology used throughout the thesis is that found in WOC.

Chapter 1

THE WISDOM ENTERPRISE

What kind of world hides behind the two biblical books of Proverbs and Qoheleth? This is a question which summarises the whole inquiry of the present work. However, it must be made clear that in asking this question I am not looking for answers of an historical nature, i.e., how and when these books were born, nor am I principally asking about their *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., what immediate purpose did they serve the community that produced and used them.[1] Rather, I am enquiring about *the kind* of people that these books represent, their concerns, aspirations, joys and struggles; about *the kind* of world in which they belong. In the following chapters I will deal in detail with a number of individual elements of this world and the place of humans in it; at present I will concentrate on the basic question of what these books are all about. An attempt will be made to sketch an elementary framework for looking at these texts, serving as the starting point for the detailed examination.

The question of what our two books are about is closely related to the wider question of what is wisdom, one which has been the subject of a considerable debate. This has been sparked initially by von Rad's (1953) attempt to identify the Joseph narrative as a wisdom material, followed by other scholars in claiming wisdom origins for a number of other OT texts, including Gen 1-11; 37; Exod 34:6ff.; Deut; Esth and the Succession narrative. However, when the definition of wisdom is

[1] This is not to say that these questions are of no interest or importance. Since the conclusions of the present enquiry will have some bearing on these issues, they will be at least briefly visited in the Excursus.

loosened to accommodate such a variety of material, it becomes virtually meaningless to speak of wisdom literature as such, and Crenshaw (1969) after consideration of the methodological issues demonstrated the need for distinction being maintained between the 'classical' wisdom texts, such as Proverbs and Qoheleth, and the other so called wisdom texts.[2] Whybray (1974) went further, arguing not only that 'the interests of scholarly investigation are not served by the application of the word "wisdom" to every manifestation to use one's brains in ancient Israel [*sic*]' (p. 3), but also that there is no coherent wisdom phenomenon found in the OT, only a loose *intellectual tradition*.[3]

While Whybray's work exposes the difficulties in identifying wisdom material on the grounds of subject, form and vocabulary, it contains certain methodological flaws, notably the fact that the disputed texts are considered to be wisdom material from the very beginning, thus prejudging the question whether wisdom can be defined narrowly, or only in broad terms. Further, the loose concept of intellectual tradition that Whybray arrives at is of no more practical use than the watered-down definition of wisdom which he is so critical of. At the same time, Whybray is, in my view, on the right track at least to some extent, when he starts looking at wisdom outwith the confines of a literary genre. The central question with respect to wisdom is not, in my view, one of forms and vocabulary, but rather the question of what wisdom is really about. I do not mean simply what type of subjects we find in wisdom literature, but rather what aspirations hide behind the texts and what methodology is used to achieve them. It is these categories that differentiate between a scientist and a philosopher, between a preacher and a biblical scholar, i.e., among smaller segments of a broad intellectual tradition. Therefore, in our attempt to define wisdom we need to look primarily for a quest with an aim and procedures and maintain a distinction between the quest *per se* and texts that represents it.[4]

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[2] For a more recent rebuttal of Von Rad's analysis of the Joseph story see also Weeks (1994:92-109).
[3] A similar view has been expressed more recently by Weeks (1999).
[4] The text is a particular deposit of the quest, yet, it is important to appreciate that the books such as Proverbs or Qoheleth are not the wisdom quest *per se*, they are merely its product, vehicles for

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Consequently, I will approach Proverbs and Qoheleth, from this perspective. As a starting point I will take Crenshaw's (1969:132) definition of the wisdom undertaking as 'the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator'. This definition applies fully to both books, *self-understanding* being its key term. Wisdom, as we find it in Proverbs and Qoheleth, is not simply about making and stating observations, nor is it about formulating rules. It is about penetrating beyond that which is observed and comprehending it, but in particular, about understanding the place that a human being has in the world. This is reflected in the contemplative nature of these texts and their focus on the generalised rather than the specific.[5]

While Crenshaw's definition of wisdom is fully applicable to our two books, it still does not adequately describe what is happening in Proverbs and Qoheleth; it lacks at least two critical ingredients. First, it does not provide the answer to the question of the purpose of such a search. Neither in Proverbs, nor in Qoheleth, as we will see, is self-understanding the ultimate goal; rather it is only a means to a more tangible end. Its purpose is to live; the wisdom of our sages is not simply about understanding who they were but also about making the most of that understanding, about getting the most out of life. I, therefore, wish to propose that a more adequate description of the wisdom of Proverbs and Qoheleth is *a quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator, and for self-realisation in the context of these relationships.*

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communication of its concerns, questions and conclusions. This can be seen from the fact that while writing and composing are occasionally mentioned, they play no real role within the perspective of the two books. This point may seem obvious and unnecessary. Yet, the danger that the wisdom quest will be seen as the exercise of producing these texts is very real and led in the past to treating Proverbs, in particular, as a scribal exercise and, thus, reducing the enterprise behind them to scribal duties and skills. Such an attitude toward the material obscures the profound nature of the central concerns that these texts represent; cf. McKenzie (1967:2).

[5] Here lies the fundamental difference between material such as Proverbs or Qoheleth on the one hand and texts such as the Joseph narrative. Non-wisdom OT texts may have an educational purpose, but they do not combine the contemplative with the generalisation; narratives may lead to contemplation, but present specific cases, while legal and cultic materials typically present generalisations but, being principally prescriptive, lack the striving for understanding.

The second component lacking in Crenshaw's definition has to do with methodology. In our search to understand the material in front of us we need to go deeper than merely attempting to understand the aims that hide behind these books. It is not enough to know what the wisdom thinkers were broadly doing, we also need to understand *how* they carried out the quest for understanding, and our definition of the wisdom undertaking should reflect this.

The *how*-question can be further separated into two narrower issues. The first of these concerns the epistemological perspective of the sages, the basic processes through which they obtained and evaluated their data, i.e., how they got to their self-understanding. This in itself is a complex matter which I will leave aside for the moment and return to in the next chapter. The second sub-question concerns the methods that the sages used to get from the raw knowledge, i.e., the self-understanding, to fulfilling their aim, i.e., the self-realisation, and it is this question that I will concentrate on in the remainder of this chapter.

I will start this consideration by drawing a distinction between two rather different approaches to understanding a particular phenomenon. The first approach is exact; to understand a phenomenon means to be able to describe fully the mechanics of it, to describe it *as it really is*. The search for understanding then is a search for complete comprehension. Such a concept of understanding is common in the exact sciences, but can be found outside of this arena, for instance in dogmatics. The other mode of understanding is what I will call practical. Outside of the arena of pure sciences one may knowingly and purposefully settle for understanding that is only partial. This is simply because in practical aspects of life such an imprecision may not be significant enough to warrant the search for a more complete understanding, or, because a more complete understanding becomes too complex to be practically applicable, or because the exact mode is too elusive.

The principal difference between the two approaches is not in the fact that one is complete and the other is only partial, for the mere conviction that something

is complete does not guarantee it to be so, and even in the exact sciences perspectives develop and come to be modified from time to time, sometimes radically. The key difference lies in the attitudes that accompany the two modes, in the fact that in the latter case the imprecision is acknowledged and considered acceptable, while in the former case imprecision is a fundamental flaw that has to be avoided and overcome when it is discovered. Thus, these two modes of understanding need to be evaluated differently, and the answer to the question whether the two books ahead of us approach the world in the former or the latter manner will fundamentally influence our view of them. Consequently, it is worthwhile to consider some of the basic characteristics that distinguish the latter approach from the former.

At the heart of practical knowledge is a paradigm. By a paradigm I mean a theoretical system which describes a behaviour of some other, real system, and is used to predict the state of the real system on the basis of some input data. However, the theoretical system, i.e., the paradigm, is always simpler than the real system. For example, the student of BH learns vowel patterns of different Hebrew stems and the endings of the verbal suffix conjugation. This allows her to create an appropriate suffix conjugation form when given the root, the stem, the person and the grammatical gender. While this paradigm may seem overwhelming to the student at first, it saves her memorising all possible forms of all possible roots for all the stems. As is obvious from this example, the simplification of a paradigm is achieved by exploiting patterns of behaviour exhibited by the real system.[6]

A second property of a paradigm is closely linked to the first one. A paradigm, because it is simpler than the real system, only produces results that are an approximation of the true state of the real system. For example, the basic paradigm for formulating the past tense of an English verb works well with most verbs, but

[6] That such a conjugation table is a paradigm and not the real system itself is clear from the fact that the native speaker is likely to be fluent in the language and entirely able to decline and conjugate long before he or she might even come across a grammar book. It is now commonly recognised that grammar is descriptive rather than prescriptive, i.e., grammar is a paradigm, a theoretical system attempting to describe the real system, i.e., language.

there are some 200 cases where it produces incorrect results. The imprecision of a paradigm can be approached in two basic ways. The first option is for the exceptions to be listed, i.e., the student is made to memorise a list of the irregular English verbs. The second alternative is to look for ways of improving the paradigm to cover the exceptions. Thus, when rules of vowel contraction are added to the basic paradigm for conjugating a Greek verb, it can be applied to contracted verbs, which otherwise would have to be treated as exceptions. While this second approach may seem to be the better solution by far, its shortcoming resides in the fact that as the complexity of the paradigm increases, its practical usability diminishes; the strength of a paradigm resides in its simplicity. Thus a compromise will always be necessary between a paradigm's precision and complexity; a good English textbook will make use of the fact that within the group of irregular verbs there are subgroups formed along the same patterns, but will not try to overcomplicate the matter.

Further, it is often impossible to enumerate the exceptions either because they are too many, or because the real system is not entirely deterministic. In such a case a third approach will often be taken, a simple acknowledgement that the paradigm does not always work to complete satisfaction. The key question then is how often it does produce satisfactory results. Some paradigms, such as those used in engineering disciplines, are scrutinised meticulously, but in daily life, such an evaluation is usually less pronounced, often intuitive, based on personal or collective experience. At the same time, while the limits of such common paradigms may not be discussed at great length, they are tacitly understood to be there.

A further characteristic of a paradigm is that it is formulated to serve a purpose, and that it is entirely subject to this purpose. A typical paradigm has an immediate aim and a broader aim. The immediate aim concerns the modelling of the real system, the broader aim has to do with exploiting the knowledge of the behaviour of the real system. The real value of the paradigm resides not in it being able to serve the immediate aim, but precisely in it facilitating reaching the broader aim. A conjugation table will have as its immediate aim facilitation of conjugating

and parsing a verb. While some linguists may find this to be an exciting exercise *per se*, it is not the ultimate reason why conjugation tables are created (although a first year BH student may think otherwise). The broader aim is to enable one to learn to use the language correctly and effectively. Here lies one of the principal differences between a practical paradigm and a scientific theory, for the latter has only the immediate aim and its value resides in it being able to fully satisfy it.[7]

Alongside the intended purpose, each individual paradigm is meant to be used under specific, and sometimes rather limited, circumstances. It is quite normal to have several different paradigms that describe the same real system and serve the same purpose but are intended to be used in a distinct circumstance. Thus a typical grammar of biblical Hebrew will present a number of distinct paradigms to accommodate the different types of weak verbs alongside the strong verb.

In addition to these basic characteristics of a paradigm, one further issue needs to be considered: the paradigm's *reversibility*. Some paradigms are reversible, i.e., from a state of the real system it is possible, using the paradigm, to derive the input conditions that led to such a state. The way present participles are formed in English can serve as an example of such a paradigm. When one encounters a word ending in *-ing* it can be surmised with a significant degree of certainty that it is a present participle and the present stem can be found by removing the ending. On the other hand, the paradigm for forming the regular plural of an English noun is not reversible. When one is presented with a form that ends in *-s*, it is not possible to determine without additional information whether it is a plural form of a noun, a third person singular verb in the present tense, or whether the *-s* is a part of the stem itself. In general, real systems where distinct inputs can produce identical outputs and systems that are not entirely deterministic will be described by paradigms that are not reversible.

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[7] True, science can often be driven by utilitarian forces, but these tend to hinder rather than encourage the scientific enterprise and are external to it.

In conclusion, the discussion of the nature of paradigms can be summarised as follows. A paradigm, as it will be understood in the present work, is a simplification that carries with it a systematic error. It is intended to be used under certain specific conditions and has a two-fold purpose; the systematic error of such a paradigm is considered insignificant for the particular purpose. Not all paradigms are reversible, notably paradigms that describe processes that are not completely deterministic are not.

Having explained what I mean by paradigmatic understanding, I can now return to our two texts. Is the enterprise reflected in them paradigmatic in the sense outlined above? It is, if it satisfies the following two conditions: (1) it is understood by the respective books that the depiction of the world they offer is incomplete but the possible error is considered of only limited significance under the specific circumstances; (2) the two books offer understanding with a practical end in mind and the value of this understanding is in its practical application. To answer the question postulated here, it is necessary to have a closer look at the key characteristics of the perspectives that we find in the two books.

An Outline of the Proverbial Perspective

The Basic Structure of the Proverbial Worldview

The overall framework of the proverbial perspective reflects the three distinct elements contained in Crenshaw's definition of wisdom, i.e., the relationships with things, people and the Creator. Yet, these are not addressed in equal proportions. Relatively little attention is given to the understanding of the relationships with things, and the examination of the relationship with God is also fairly limited and largely implicit. The proverbial emphasis lies on the middle element, on understanding people. At the heart of the proverbial perspective is a world polarised into two camps. This polarisation is all inclusive, there are no other types of people, or more precisely, as will become clear in a moment, of responsible adults. One

camp is perceived as positive, the other as negative. I will refer to the positive as *the wise* and to the negative as *the fools*. In fact, the terminology is more complex and a number of distinct expressions are associated with both groups. The following paragraphs will take a brief look at the most important of these in order to delimit the two groups more clearly. However, before I do so, a more general comment on the nature of wisdom vocabulary is needed.

Even a brief glance at the book of Proverbs, and OT wisdom texts in general, reveals that the wisdom tradition uses certain characteristic vocabulary. We can distinguish two groups of lexemes in particular: words that are exclusive to Proverbs/OT wisdom literature, and words attested elsewhere, but used with an increased frequency in Proverbs/OT wisdom.[8] While these two groups deserve special attention, we need to resist the temptation to automatically label either of these vocabulary sets as *technical*. The fact that a lexeme is exclusive to the traditional OT wisdom corpus does not necessarily mean that it was not used in other contexts, only that it is *not attested* so in our body of texts, which is relatively small and specialised; this factor should be taken into consideration before we label such unique words or phrases as *technical*.[9] Similarly, a high frequency of a lexeme in the wisdom corpus does not mean that it belongs to the technical vocabulary of wisdom, or that occurrences of such a word outside of this corpus indicate wisdom influence.[10] A distinction is necessary between what is *typical* vocabulary, and what

[8] By 'OT wisdom literature' I mean here the three OT books available in Hebrew broadly agreed to be wisdom literature, i.e., Proverbs, Qoheleth and Job, and the so-called wisdom psalms.

[9] The assumption that *exclusive* to our corpus of texts equals *technical* is in the background of the argument about the *Sitz im Leben* of Proverbs by Shupak (1987). Having identified 14 expressions that are exclusive to the wisdom corpus, she attempts to ascertain their equivalents in Egyptian instructions and school texts, and argues that these indicate that both the Egyptian material and the wisdom texts have the same *Sitz im Leben*. Yet, it is dubious whether some of these expressions should be considered technical. For instance, since the adjective חָסֵר is not exclusive to wisdom and לֵב is the ordinary word for *mind*, it is conceivable that the expression חֲסַר לֵב could have been a common one. Similarly, since חֵמָה is regularly used in the sense *anger* and אִישׁ is commonly used in 'converting' nouns into adjectives (WOC 9.5.3b), the assumption that the phrase אִישׁ חֵמָה is a technical wisdom expression is questionable. The vivid imagery of קַר רוּחַ and קְצַר רוּחַ is easily conceivable and could hardly have been limited to the wisdom circles, and the references to *beating* and *rod*, are more likely to allude to the upbringing of children in general rather than indicate a school setting.

[10] A similar view is expressed by Whybray (1974:75) and more recently by Weeks (1994:90).

is *technical* vocabulary in the proper sense, i.e., vocabulary used with a sufficiently distinct, or refined, sense from that found in non-wisdom texts. Only a limited number of words found in Proverbs are truly technical.[11]

Among the vocabulary used to define the above-mentioned polarity wise/fools, the derivatives of the root חכם feature prominently, of which the adjective/noun חָכָם, is the most common representative. The meaning of חָכָם, as used in the OT outside of the wisdom books, can be broadly placed into two categories. First, in the more general sense, it denotes that a person possesses a certain skill, most often a cognitive skill, although not exclusively [e.g. Exod 31:6]. This meaning is ethically neutral. It denotes a proficiency, which can be put to both good and bad use, although the former is more common.[12] The ethically-positive English *wise* is a somewhat limping equivalent; the range of meanings of the Hebrew word is broader.

Second, the plural form חֲכָמִים is used on a number of occasions with reference to the royal advisors, both at Israelite and foreign courts. The view that these wise men should be identified with a professional group, namely the palace advisors, was most extensively advocated by McKane (1965). With Whybray (1974), I have reservations about McKane's argument at a number of points, which leave the whole case untenable.[13] At the same time, Whybray's (1974:15-31) argument for

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[11] The book of Proverbs, and the Wisdom literature in general, are preoccupied with the cognitive. Consequently, there is a great concentration of words describing this side of human/divine nature. Yet, many of these expressions appear throughout the Hebrew bible with the same meaning and without any wisdom connotations. For a complete survey of the distribution in the OT of the vocabulary common in wisdom texts see Whybray (1974:75-154). Whybray shows that most of the common wisdom expressions cannot be considered technical in any real sense; unfortunately he fails to notice the distinct use of some vocabulary in Proverbs (see the following discussion of חָכָם and פֶּתִי).

[12] See 2 Sam 13:3ff for an example where wisdom is clearly void of any positive ethical connotations.

[13] McKane depends heavily on the assertion that 2 Sam 16:23 implies that prophecy and wisdom were two parallel and competing systems of guidance in Israel during the early monarchy (p. 55-58). He, however, fails to notice that the statement of 2 Sam 16:23 refers exclusively to Ahithopel, but clearly not to Hushai. Consequently, this is not a statement about the office or profession, but about the exquisite abilities of an individual. The assertion that the same dualism is also to be seen in 2 Sam 14:17, 19; 19:27 is equally unconvincing. Further, McKane's claim that עֵצָה is a technical word of the secular wisdom was convincingly refuted by Whybray (1974:132-33), who pointed out that this claim requires that the wise would be *a priori* identified as the palace politicians, thus begging the

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there not being any professional use of the word חָכָם in the OT is not convincing either. While not all the passages where the technical use is commonly assumed need to be understood so, on some occasions a major degree of exegetical ingenuity is necessary to make the text to conform Whybray's thesis.[14] My own view is that there are places where the term חֲכָמִים is used in a professional sense [e.g. Jer 18:18], but that this use needs to be identified cautiously. The key question concerning the references to the royal advisors is that of precedence; are these men called wise because they are the king's advisors, or are they the king's advisors because they are wise? In other words, is it a title derived from the position, or is their position a result of their ability expressed by the title? The answer to this question can only by obtained from the wisdom tradition itself, for it is there where the self-identity of the wise is expressed.

In the book of Proverbs we find a similar twofold distribution of the meaning of the root חכם. Most occurrences are of the first type, referring to skill. However, closer examination of its semantics shows that the actual sense has been significantly narrowed, so that it is possible to speak of a technical usage. The adjective חָכָם in Proverbs does not designate a person with just any skill, but someone who lives according to the principles expressed in the book, and has an understanding of the consequences of human actions that agree with the book's perspective [e.g. Prov 10:14; 13:20; 14:3, 16; 15:31-32]. Wisdom in Proverbs is not so much to do with intellectual knowledge or abilities, but it is essentially a *commitment* to a way of life.[15] Further, being wise in the proverbial sense is not so much a state but, rather, a process, a desire and striving for perfection [e.g. Prov 9:8; 12:15; 21:11]. The most important characteristics of the wise in Proverbs include fear of God [e.g. Prov 3:7; 14:16], the willingness to learn continually [e.g. Prov 1:5; 9:8-9; 10:14; 12:15; 13:1; 15:12; 25:12], working

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question. In many of the passages interpreted by McKane as an apologetic against wisdom, the vocabulary is more likely to be due to the topic of the discourse, with the polemic aimed more generally than at a specific and narrow class of palace professionals.

[14] A prime example is Whybray's seven-page discussion of Jer 18:18 which reaches the conclusion that the verse is a pejorative numerical saying concerned with excessive talking (pp. 24-31).

[15] This is most clearly seen in those proverbs that actually use the imagery of a path [e.g. Prov 4:10-19; 15:10; 23:19].

for the benefit of the community [e.g. Prov 11:12], respect for justice [e.g. Prov 8:20; 17:23; 18:5, 29:7], compassion for the poor [e.g. Prov 14:20-21, 31; 19:17], working diligently [e.g. Prov 12:11], and exercising self-control [e.g. Prov 29:11] (with special emphasis on control of speech [Prov 12:18; 14:3; 16:23]).

Alongside this basic sense of חָכָם, the plural form חֲכָמִים is quite clearly used in a still narrower sense in Prov 1:6. Here the surrounding vocabulary shows that it designates people involved with the literary forms found in the book, quite clearly those who formulate and pass on the principles that constitute wisdom. That this sense of חֲכָמִים is not the same here as the basic one outlined above is indicated by the fact that the book in its quest to impart wisdom, i.e., to form a חָכָם, does not directly encourage the literary activity which is explicitly associated with the חֲכָמִים. The basic distinction between these two uses is that the former one is adjectival/descriptive, the latter is nominal. This distinction is better carried over into English if חָכָם in the broader sense is rendered as *a wise person* while חֲכָמִים in the narrower sense as *the sages*. There are two other places where this usage is, in my view, attested in the book [Prov 24:23; Prov 22:17[16]], although on other occasions it is also possible [e.g. Prov 15:12].

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[16] In Prov 22:17 𝔐 reads הַט אָזְנְךָ וּשְׁמַע דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים while 𝔊 has Λόγοις σοφῶν παράβαλλε σὸν οὖς καὶ ἄκουε ἐμὸν λόγον. I am inclined to think that the Hebrew text originally read הַט אָזְנְךָ וּשְׁמַע דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים and once דִּבְרֵי חֲכָמִים became displaced, דִּבְרֵי was omitted. Since it is quite clear that a new collection of material starts at this point (note the change in form after the introduction of vv. 17-21), it is likely that *words of wise* was originally its title. Whybray (1974:48-54) objects to interpreting the occurrences of חֲכָמִים in the superscriptions as references to a class of professionals. His argument is that if Prov 22:17 is in fact a transposed superscription, then it is a prosaic text, and we would expect an article with the noun. From the lack of the article Whybray infers that the phrase should be rendered *words of clever ones*. The same rendering is then by analogy applied to Prov 1:6 and 24:23. Yet, if in case of Prov 22:17 we are dealing with a textual corruption, we have to allow for the possibility that the article dropped out when the superscription was transposed into the poetry. In addition, it is likely that the perceived lack of article is more a case of English than Hebrew usage. The plural form of the adjective could have been perceived in certain contexts by the native speakers as intrinsically definite (WOC 13.4a). Since the general contrast *definite-indefinite* in Hebrew is that of identity vs. class (WOC 13.2b), the lack of the article does not mean that the expression cannot designate a specific group. After all, the translation suggested by Whybray (*clever ones*) also denotes a specific group — the distinction of this rendering is not so much in the absence of the article, but in different semantic understanding of the word, and I have pointed out earlier that חָכָם in Proverbs does not simply mean *clever, intellectually capable*.

There is no direct additional indication in the book who these sages were. Yet, one of the central notions in Proverbs is that wisdom is available to all who show interest, and the content of the book is almost generally applicable, with no exclusive focus on any social class or otherwise defined group. While there is some indication of association of wisdom with the court, this is insufficient to fully identify the wise with the court advisors.[17] In the absence of an attempt by the sages to clearly identify themselves as anything other than the wise, it is necessary to conclude that this is their primary identity; they represent a certain intellectual movement, the concerns of which were with broad understanding of humanity, not just with politics. However, my use of *intellectual movement* differs from that of Whybray's (1974:57ff) *intellectual tradition*, in that I am convinced that while the wise cannot be identified exclusively with any other group found in the OT (e.g. politicians), they still represent a clearly defined entity of their own, and more importantly, they thought of themselves as a clearly distinct group, albeit not necessarily formally organised. The superscriptions mentioned and the comments in the epilogue of Qoheleth [Qoh 12:11-12] make that very tangible.

The second most important word associated with the wise is צַדִּיק.[18] In contrast with the word חָכָם, it can be observed that the book does not attempt to define who is צַדִּיק but rather the word is used in Proverbs with the same basic sense

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[17] I am inclined to give some historical currency to the statement about Hezekiah's court in Prov 25:21, as I am not aware of any more satisfactory explanation for its presence. The proposal that the reference to Hezekiah is to give more weight to the text by calling upon the authority of a legendary wise man and a patron of wisdom (Weeks 1994:41-46) suffers from the lack of Hezekiah's reputation for wisdom in the surviving tradition and, more critically, from the fact that the collection is not actually ascribed to Hezekiah himself, but to some anonymous men at his court. Similarly, the textual evidence for the claim that the reference is due to intertextual links between the collection and the record of Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kgs (Carasik 1994) is insufficient. This argument hinges on two roots, שׂכל and בטח, of which the former does not appear at all in Prov 25-29, and both of which are more frequently associated with David than Hezekiah. The whole superscription is construed in such a way that Hezekiah's name does not have in it any other than temporal value, indicating that even if its historical value cannot be taken for granted, in the circles that preserved the book its contents were associated with the royal court.

[18] In fact there are more occurrences of צַדִּיק in the book than of חָכָם, but the latter carries the weight of the book's aim to impart wisdom.

it has elsewhere in the OT.[19] Its meaning needs to be seen against the background of life in a community. צַדִּיק is a person who shows integrity in dealing with others and who works for the well-being of the community. Further, צַדִּיק shows integrity in his relationship with the deity, although Stigers may go too far when suggesting that צַדִּיק is 'the man who … tries to preserve the peace and prosperity of the community *by fulfilling the commands of God* in regard to others' (TWOT, p. 1879, italics mine). Being צַדִּיק is not so much about fulfilment of religious obligations, but about personal identification with what is right, an identification which the community knows it can rely on. While the vast majority of occurrences of צַדִּיק in the book have this significance, on several occasions we encounter the forensic sense *innocent* [Prov 17:15; 18:5; 24:24].[20]

The examination of the lexica used to refer to the fools possibly casts even more light on the nature of the polarity than the terms that refer to the wise. The basic word for a fool is כְּסִיל. This is a person characterised by intellectual laziness [Prov 1:22] and complacency [Prov 1:32], a stubborn and unteachable character [Prov 17:10], who will not learn even from personal experience [Prov 26:11]. He is an unrealistic and unfocused dreamer [Prov 17:24], who lives merely for the present [Prov 21:21]. While the wise learn in a joint effort, the fool's intellectual life is entirely self-centred [Prov 18:2] and his trust in his own abilities knows no limits [Prov 28:26]. Yet, כְּסִיל is not simply stupid and the term is not ethically neutral. כְּסִיל is bent on evil [Prov 10:18; 13:19] from which he derives pleasure [Prov 10:23]. He has no self-control whatsoever [Prov 29:11], and shows a tendency to initiate conflicts [Prov 18:6], even lacking respect for his closest relations [Prov 15:20].

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[19] Most of the 66 occurrences of the word in Proverbs are concerned with what happens to the person; it is assumed that the reader knows what the word means (notable exceptions are Prov 12:5; 13:5; 15:28; 20:7; 21:15, 26; 29:7). In contrast to that most of the occurrences of חָכָם in the book are descriptive of what the person does, with comparable proportion of exceptions to that above (in particular Prov 3:35; 11:29; 14:24; 16:21; 21:20, 22; 24:5).

[20] There a few additional terms used to refer to the wise largely synonymous with the two main words discussed. Among those belong נָבוֹן, a parallel to חָכָם, and יָשָׁר parallel to צַדִּיק.

A second frequent designation of the fool is לֵיץ. The basic characteristics of לֵיץ are pride and insolence [Prov 21:24] demonstrated in his refusal to admit a fault and accept correction [Prov 9:8; 13:1; 14:9; 15:12]. Similarly to כְּסִיל he causes conflicts [Prov 22:10]. It is pointless to rebuke לֵיץ for his own benefit, it is worthwhile only for the benefit of others [Prov 19:25; 21:11]. Another frequent designation of a fool is עָצֵל. This is a person who is lazy, a sluggard [Prov 6:9-11; 26:14] who has all sorts of ridiculous excuses to avoid work [Prov 22:13; 26:13]. His behaviour is sometimes described with a healthy dose of irony [Prov 26:15]. Alongside כְּסִיל and לֵיץ, עָצֵל also considers himself smarter than anyone else [Prov 26:16].

The three words discussed so far, כְּסִיל, לֵיץ, and עָצֵל, stand roughly in antithesis to חָכָם. While they all have an ethical dimension,[21] they point primarily to a flawed understanding of, or a blatant disregard for, the way the world is. When antithesis is to be created with the ethically loaded צַדִּיק, the book uses the term רָשָׁע.[22] Similarly to the use of צַדִּיק, the book does not generally attempt to define the meaning of the word.[23] From those statements that are descriptive, it can be surmised that רָשָׁע has certain clear affinities with the previous terms, for instance does not accept correction [Prov 9:7], is self-confident [Prov 21:29] and his views are of little value [Prov 10:20]. However, the main connotation of the term is that of evilness. The speech of רָשָׁע is perverse and destructive [Prov 10:32; 11:11; 12:6; 15:28]. He is deceptive [Prov 11:18; 12:5], cruel and merciless [Prov 12:10; 21:10] and perverts the course of justice to achieve his ends [Prov 17:23]. He dislikes those with integrity [Prov 29:27], and his wickedness leads to paranoia in fear for his own safety [Prov 28:1]. Further, on the account of his unethical behaviour, his religious practice is of no value [Prov 15:8-

[21] This is the case even with עָצֵל, who is perceived as not only detrimental to himself, but also to others [e.g. Prov 10:26].

[22] Alongside it we also find the impersonal רֶשַׁע, *wickedness*, typically with indirect personal reference [e.g. Prov 10:2]. Interestingly, the root רשׁע, with almost 80 occurrences, is the most common one in the book, and the adjective רָשָׁע is the most common personal attribute used by the sages.

[23] About three quarters of the occurrences are found in statements depicting what happens to such a person.

9]. Similarly to צַדִּיק, רָשָׁע can be used in a forensic sense meaning *guilty* [Prov 17:15; 24:24].

As we look at the examined vocabulary, an interesting pattern emerges. The words without primary ethical connotations such חָכָם or כְּסִיל are used mainly in statements which describe human activity, while the words of chiefly ethical significance, i.e., צַדִּיק and רָשָׁע are used largely in statements that describe the consequences of human behaviour. It has been suggested in the past that the two groups of words come from distinct traditions, the former from an older, secular wisdom, the latter from a later theological reworking of the originally secular tradition (McKane 1970:10-22). However, the authority of the book rests largely on the ethical vocabulary, since it is the ethical lexemes that are largely linked with the consequences; this makes such a view of the book implausible. In addition, the antithesis righteous/wicked is found repeatedly in the Aramaic Ahikar, showing that this type of proverb is certainly not exclusively Yahwistic, and further, the only occurrence of the root *ḥk̲m* in known Western Semitic inscriptions contains reference to righteousness (Weeks 1994:69-70). When all this is held together with the fact that the two ethical terms occur in the book more frequently than their non-ethical counterparts, it would appear to emerge that ethical considerations are at the very heart of the bipolar structure of the proverbial paradigm; the righteous in the book are the same as the wise and the wicked are the same as the fools.

The bipolarity wise/fools in itself is not adequate to outline the proverbial perspective, but has to be seen as linked to a conviction that God is fully in control of the world and that he is on the side of the wise [e.g. Pr 3:33; 10:3; 15:29; 18:10]. As a result, the world of the proverbial sages is regular and predictable and those who belong among the wise will succeed in it and prosper.[24]

[24] This issue will be dealt with in detail in chapter 3.

The Aims of the Proverbs and the Working Parameters of Proverbial Wisdom

Having considered the basic structure of the proverbial worldview, I will now turn in greater detail to the question of what end the sages pursued. In order to understand the aim of the book of Proverbs, we first need to deal with another lexical term which does not fit into the otherwise strictly bipolar classification of people as wise or fools, the פֶּתִי. This word occurs only twice in the OT outside of the wisdom texts with the basic sense of one who is simple, naïve, not entirely responsible for his or her actions.[25] In wisdom material the sense is more narrowly defined. The פֶּתִי is an individual who is immature because he is untrained in wisdom.[26] He has a double identity in Proverbs. He is not a fool *per se*, yet, has a natural inclination toward foolish behaviour and is easy to fool because he lacks experience [Prov 14:15; 22:3; 27:12]. Thus, he is sometimes listed alongside the fools [Prov 1:22-33; 14:18]. However, this natural leaning can be overcome through learning and discipline. He has the potential to become wise, and so is sometimes found alongside this other group [Prov 1:2-6; 19:25].

The possibility of moulding the פֶּתִי into a wise person is what principally distinguishes him from those who are classed as fools.[27] In contrast, the fools are unlikely to be reformed.[28] This is not because the fool is somewhat less capable than the פֶּתִי, but it is the result of the fool's previous choice not to pursue wisdom. The transformation of a פֶּתִי into a fool is captured in the following passage:

> Until when will [you] immature love immaturity? (But[29] scorners revel[30] in laziness, and fools will always hate knowledge.) Should[31] you turn to my

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[25] The non-wisdom occurrences are Ezek 45:20; Ps 116:6. Note the parallel with אִישׁ שֹׁגֶה in Ezek 45:20.

[26] Outside of Proverbs it is found in the wisdom psalms 19:7 and 119:130, in both cases of someone being educated (חכם used in the former case, בין in the latter).

[27] See for instance Prov 19:25; 21:11 alongside Prov 9:7-9. While rebuking a mocker (i.e. a fool) is in itself a pointless exercise, it has a value when it serves as a negative example for the פֶּתִי.

[28] However, even the fool is not entirely rejected, e.g. Prov 8:5.

[29] The shift to 3rd person shows that the sluggards and fools are not addressed by Wisdom, and requires disjunctive rendering of the conjunction ו. The B and C colons are best understood as an independent proverb used as a parenthetical comment (cf. Emerton 1968).

[30] Oesterley (11) emends to חֲמַדְתֶּם to conform with the 2nd person address in the preceding clause, but the 3rd person in the next clause suggests that this is not a scribal error, but an intentional shift — it is only the simple that are addressed by Wisdom. The Sx is gnomic, the following Px is habitual.

> rebuke, see, I would pour out to you my spirit, I would reveal to you my words. Since I called and you refused [to listen], since I stretched my hand, and no-one was paying any attention, since you neglected all my advice and did not wish to accept my rebuke, I also will laugh at your disaster, and will mock [you] when your calamity comes — when your calamity comes like a storm (and your disaster will [surely][32] come upon you as a hurricane), when distress and agony come upon you.
>
> Then they will call[33] me, and I will not answer; they will seek[33] me — they will not find me. This is because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of Yahweh. They did not wish to accept my advice, and rejected all my rebukes, and [so] they will eat[34] from the fruit of their ways, and they will be sated from their own cleverness.[35] For the apostasy of the immature will kill them, and the carelessness of the fools will destroy them. [Prov 1:22-32]

Wisdom here is addressing a group of פְּתָיִם who are about to become fools. In v. 22A Wisdom speaks directly to the immature; in contrast to that, the fools are only mentioned indirectly in the third person. The second person address in v. 23ff. is also directed at the simple, since the categorical statement of v. 22C about the fools' persistent attitude to knowledge indicates that the glimmer of hope contained in v. 23 can only refer to the פְּתָיִם.

The climactic point in the story is the arrival of the disaster. In the pre-disaster section [vv. 22-28] there is some hope for the simple which, in spite of the fact that they appear to be nearing the critical point rapidly, makes it worthwhile for Wisdom to address them. With the arrival of the disaster the situation changes dramatically. The פְּתָיִם must now bear the consequences of their folly, they are no more spoken to in the second person, but only spoken of in the third person just as the fools were earlier on; they are now considered fools.

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[31] Px best understood in modal sense, cf. McKane (1970:274) who treats the verse as a conditional clause without a conditional particle.

[32] Note the change of tense from ptc to Px.

[33] Paragogic nun often denotes a contrast, such as exceptions to normal practice (WOC 31.7.1), which is likely the case here.

[34] In the light of the B colon it is unlikely that this is intended as modal *they will have to*.

[35] מוֹעֲצָה is mostly used in negative contexts, but the noun itself can have positive connotations [cf. Prov 22:20].

The critical failure of the פְּתָיִם is their מְשׁוּבָה [v. 32]. This rare word in the OT[36] is found parallel to רָעָה [Jr 2:19] and פֶּשַׁע [Jr 5:6], but it is not synonymous with them. The basic sense of מְשׁוּבָה is relational, it has to do with abandoning a person.[37] In this passage it refers to the פְּתָיִם abandoning the speaking Wisdom. By the act of מְשׁוּבָה the simple become fools, and when they try to get hold of Wisdom later on, she has turned to a new audience for which the once פְּתָיִם, now suffering fools, become a deterring example. This passage shows both the distinction between the פֶּתִי and the fool, but also the very close natural affinity of the two groups; it takes no effort for the פֶּתִי to become a fool.

What then is the aim of Proverbs? The book's explicit intention is to make a wise person out of the immature [Prov 1:2-6]. The פֶּתִי, who in the book is generally an uncommitted youth who has reached a point of adulthood where he has to assume responsibility for his life,[38] is the primary addressee in the book [Prov 1:4,[39] 22; 8:5; 9:4]. He finds himself in the bipolar world of the wise and the fools with both sides trying to 'recruit' him. The first nine chapters of the book are essentially a polemic of the wise camp which should convince the פֶּתִי to join them. In these chapters various witnesses are brought in, the father, the grandfather,[40] and even Wisdom herself, all

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[36] In 𝔐 found in Hos 11:7; 14:5; Jer 2:19; 3:6, 8, 11, 22; 5:6, 8; 14:7; Prov 1:32. In 𝔊 also likely in Ezek 37:23. It was further proposed for Prov 12:28 in place of 𝔐 נְתִיבָה (e.g. KBL^2), but this cannot be easily accounted for as a scribal error, whether audible or visual.

[37] God is the person abandoned elsewhere in the OT, but from its place in the marriage metaphor of Jer 3:6ff it is clear that on its own מְשׁוּבָה does not have an exclusively religious frame of reference.

[38] The identification of the פֶּתִי as a young person is most clearly made in Prov 7:7. That Proverbs is essentially a beginner's primer of wisdom has long been observed, thus for instance Jerome stated: 'Solomon wrote his three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Canticle, in order to instruct mankind in the three stages of the spiritual life. Proverbs taught men how to live virtuously in the world and was meant for beginners. Ecclesiastes taught them to despise the things of the world as vain and fleeting and was meant for the *proficientes*. The Canticle told initiates of the love of God.' (Smalley as quoted in Murphy 1982:331-32).

[39] Note how in Prov 1:2-6 the purpose of the book is denoted by the repeated construction לְ + infc. Verse 5, in light of its deviation from this pattern, should be understood as a parenthetical comment — the book is for the simple, but even those already wise can learn from it.

[40] Prov 4:4ff. Note how the previously singular vocative *my son* changes into pl. *sons* in Prov 4:1 and back to the sg. in 4:4. This is a rhetorical device which is intended to distinguish the voice of the father from that of the grandfather's address to the father. This understanding is further supported by the fact that the next occurrence of בָּנִים [Prov 5:7] is directly preceded by וְעַתָּה indicating the present flow of the discourse is being interrupted; since the topic remains the same, change of speaker is the best explanation for the interruption.

of whom testify to the benefits of wisdom and the shortcomings of folly, and the consequences of following one or the other are presented in a very tangible manner. Thus, on one level, it is the book's intention to impart wisdom.

Yet, as I have pointed out previously, wisdom in Proverbs is not so much about knowing as about doing through knowing, about a commitment to a way of life. The following verse can serve as an illustration of this point:

> A prudent man sees trouble and takes cover, but the simple walk on and get punished. [Prov 22:3]

It is not the seeing that distinguishes between the prudent and the simple, it is the action that follows; the proverbial wisdom is all about action and it is supposed to enable one to live successfully.

From our discussion so far, we can see behind the proverbial wisdom a twofold aim, characteristic of the practical approach to understanding. On the immediate plain it wishes to impart knowledge about the world and to make the simple wise. Yet, behind this immediate aspiration hides the more tangible end, the desire to succeed and to be happy.[41] In this respect, therefore, proverbial wisdom fits both the proposed definition of wisdom and the paradigmatic way of thinking outlined earlier in this chapter. It must be further concluded that with the simple youth being the principal intended audience, the book defines for itself a context within which its perspective is to be understood; it should be seen as an introduction

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[41] This is a simplification that is adequate for outlining the proverbial worldview at the moment, but it has to be noted that the value of wisdom is not derived solely from its practical benefits, the whole issue being complicated by the relationship between wisdom and God, which will be discussed in chapter. 3. The success is perceived in terms of material prosperity, physical well-being, reputation in the society, longevity and harmonious relationships (the most comprehensive depiction of success is found in the poem about the woman of valour). Yet, while the material aspect of success is by far the most pronounced in the book, hoarding wealth is not construed as the sole purpose of life [e.g. Prov 23:4], nor is material prosperity an aim with the highest priority as will be seen in chapter 4. I wish to suggest that the pronounced material emphasis is to some extent due to the intended audience. Although the wise are invited to come along, the principal aim of the book is to instruct the פֶּתִי [Prov 1:1-6], and it is conceivable that he lacks the sufficient motivation to pursue wisdom with such vigour as his mentors would like him to; he needs to be convinced of the benefits.

to wisdom for this youth, not as an attempt to deal exhaustively with the enigmas of life.

Having shown that the first characteristic of the paradigmatic approach is present in the proverbial wisdom, I will now look at the second question posed earlier, notably whether the proverbial depiction of the world is understood in the book to have inherent limitations or whether it is perceived as a complete representation of the reality.

How Complete is the Proverbial Picture?

When one first reads through the proverbial material, the world which emerges is very black and white: the wise prosper and the fools come to destruction, over and over again. Is this the whole picture, or are there indications in the book of the sages' awareness that such an understanding is subject to exceptions? A closer reading shows that indeed some exceptions are at least implied, if not explicitly stated, for wisdom can sometimes accompany poverty:

> A poor man who walks in his integrity is better than one with twisted lips[42] and who is a fool.[43] [Prov 19:1]

While sayings of this type are scarce in the book, the fact that the premise about prosperity of the wise and destruction of the fools has to be reiterated again and again is a further indirect indication that this claim is not always obviously true.

This in itself should be a sufficient reason not to perceive the book too simplistically as a collection of dogmas. It should be further noted, that wisdom is not seen in the book as a mere possession of information. From its introduction it transpires that the intention of Proverbs is not simply to impart a set of rules, but

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[42] 𝔐 שְׂפָתָיו; 𝔖 ܡܠܝܗܝ, possibly reading דְּרָכָיו but more likely improving the parallelism; the whole verse is missing in 𝔊.

[43] 𝔐 כְּסִיל; 𝔖 ܥܒܕ, i.e., עָשִׁיר, but the texts of the 7a1 family read ܫܚܩ, supporting 𝔐, although it is possible that this a result of harmonising the text with the Hebrew. I am inclined to agree with Toy (368), that the alternative reading represented by 𝔖, is probably the result of smoothing the parallelism and harmonisation with Prov 28:6.

rather, the book aims to equip the simple *to understand* the words of the wise in their different forms [Prov 1:6]. That is, it is the stated intention of the book to foster the ability to scrutinise different perspectives, suggesting that a distinction between the quest for wisdom *per se* and the specific expression of it found in the book is present here; there is wisdom even outside Proverbs. A person who is perceived as wise can still learn and grow in wisdom. If being wise had simply meant acquiring the specific set of rules contained in the book, there would have been no way that the wise could have become any wiser from the same book. Yet, the prospect of a wise person learning from Proverbs is explicitly acknowledged [Prov 1:5]. Proverbial wisdom is, therefore, not a fixed body of doctrine, but rather a process of active interaction among the wise helping each other to grow in wisdom [e.g. Prov 9:8; 17:10]; unteachability characterises the fool. Therefore, the concept of wisdom in Proverbs is that of an ongoing and fundamentally collective quest for understanding.

Thus, even on the grounds of this brief discussion, we can conclude that the proverbial perspective is genuinely paradigmatic in the sense defined earlier, having pragmatic thrust and being aware of its limits. Consequently, theological dogmatism is not an adequate explanation for the fact that the continuing nature of the wisdom quest and the exceptions to the proverbial scheme of things are expressed in the book only in a subtle manner. Partly this is, as it has been already suggested, due to the focus on the simple. However, any paradigm is valid only when the exceptions to it are relatively insignificant with respect to its aim. In this context, the primary addressee is not an adequate explanation for lack of wider acknowledgement of disparity between the proverbial perspective and the reality of the world; it is improbable that the sages insisted on the simple gaining this particular perspective only to have to abandon it immediately. Thus, if, from our contemporary experience, the book appears to be very naïve, we must resist the temptation to see it is a naïve product of a dogmatic mind. Rather, we should first examine the possibility whether the book might not have originated in conditions where the reality was much closer

to the proverbial scheme of things than it is today, and I will argue in chapter 4 that this is in fact the case.[44]

The Reversibility of the Proverbial Paradigm

I now wish to turn to the question whether the basic paradigm, as presented in the book of Proverbs, is understood to be reversible or not. It has been pointed out above, that one of the marks of success in the perspective of this book is material prosperity. If the righteous accumulates wealth, is it equally true that the wealthy person is righteous? The answer to this question in Proverbs is no, for it is possible to obtain wealth by dishonest means, and further, the poor, as we have already seen, can belong to the wise camp. This is quite clear when it is asserted that it is better to be poor but have integrity than to be wealthy and unscrupulous [Prov 16:19; 28:6; 19:1]. In other words where choice should be made between integrity and wealth the former is to be selected. Since the basic division of the society in the paradigm is bipolar and since the proverbial material is intended to produce a wise person from the immature, this implies quite clearly that the wise may sometimes be poor, or at least poorer than the wicked fool, precisely because in his wisdom he refuses to be dishonest. It is therefore necessary to conclude that the proverbial paradigm as it is presented in the book is irreversible.

This should not be surprising since the real system with which the book deals is acknowledged not to be entirely deterministic, for God directs it at his pleasure [e.g. Prov 16:9; 21:1].[45] However, as this fact is not particularly stressed, most probably intentionally, it is easy to overlook it and treat the paradigm as reversible. Such a

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[44] Although the proverbial approach is not dogmatic in principle, the line that separates it from being so in practical terms is very thin, and this is critical to understanding the relationship between Proverbs and Qoheleth. The proverbial worldview does not respond very well to significant changes in human experience. The principal reason for this is in the specifics of, and a very tight link between, the sage's epistemology and cosmology. We will examine these two aspects of the proverbial worldview in the next two chapters and return to this larger problem in chapter 5.

[45] The theological perspective of the book will be addressed in detail in chapter 3.

tendency is likely to be amplified if sight of the implicit limits of proverbial wisdom is lost. It is not necessary to provide lengthy proof that paradigms very similar (if not identical) to the proverbial one were perceived as an exact depiction of the world and treated as reversible already in antiquity: Job's friends and Ps 37 serve as suitable examples.

Formal Expression of the Paradigm

Finally, a brief note is appropriate on some of the literary features of the book relating to the paradigm. The book is made up of two formally distinct bodies of material, the initial nine chapters and the rest of the book. The former is characterised by longer units that tend to have a narrative line, while the latter is made of several collections of short sayings, that are sometimes grouped into sections using different poetic techniques, sometimes based on sound, other times on catchwords,[46] but, as I have pointed out in the Introduction, still retaining their autonomy.

These shorter sayings can be classified according to their form into two types, that of *wisdom sentence* and that of *instruction*. The former is characterised by use of indicative mode, the latter by imperative mode (McKane 1970:3). Yet, this formal distinction should not be pressed too far when the function is considered, for it is only significant on the level of locution with both forms having the same illocutionary force; both are intended to make the addressee act, or not act, in a certain way. The sometimes made assertion that the indicative sentences are mere dispassionate statements of observation without any implied judgement is untenable. Austin (1962) argued convincingly that it is not possible to distinguish constantive and performative statements on the grounds of grammatical criteria, such as verbal mood (p. 53-66), reaching the conclusion that all speech is performative by function, and that no human speech, with the possible exception of swearing, has merely

[46] See in particular McCreesh (1991) and Van Leeuwen (1988).

constantive value (pp. 132-46). That this is so in the case of the contrast between *wisdom sentence* and *instruction* can be demonstrated, for instance, in Prov 23:24-25, where a wisdom sentence [v. 24] is followed by a proverb which is almost identical with it, except that it has the form of an instruction [v. 25]; the illocutionary forces of both of these verses are undoubtedly identical.

While the formal differences between Prov 1-9 and Prov 10-31 are striking, there is one other issue that distinguishes these two sections, and which is, in my view, of much greater significance. It can be observed that the collections of sayings found in Prov 10-30 have one particular purpose: they introduce the reader to what it means to be wise. Thus, they depict what the wise people do, what the fools do, what the righteous do, what the wicked do. In contrast, almost all of the initial nine chapters are filled with calls to acquire wisdom at all costs and to be wise, but they contain relatively little of practical instruction, with the exception of warnings against strange women. In other words, it is virtually impossible to build a picture of what wisdom is from these chapters. This character of the opening section of the book implies that they serve primarily as an introduction to the wisdom enterprise and are intended to motivate the simple to become wise. The way of wisdom itself is then expressed in the form of the short sayings that follow.[47]

It needs to be appreciated that the brevity of the two literary forms chosen as the primary means through which the paradigm is expressed has important implications for our understanding of it. As a result of the pettiness of the sayings, none of them contains a full picture of reality; rather each individual saying offers a mere glimpse at the world from a particular narrow angle. The paradigm is constructed as a kaleidoscope, where the whole image of the world is created by a combination of the glimpses that the individual proverbs offer, and is more than a

[47] This observation has certain bearing on the issue of formation of the book, to which I will return later.

simple sum of the parts. As the paradigm is examined, it is necessary to focus on the intended whole, not on the individual sayings in isolation.[48]

An Outline of Qoheleth's Perspective

The Basic Structure of Qoheleth's Worldview

In contrast to the proverbial paradigm which places greatest emphasis on an understanding of the human element, in Qoheleth there is much more stress on the interaction between the world and human beings and the role of God in this interaction; Qoheleth's perspective can be labelled theo-cosmological. The critical environment in which human life is taking place is not the human collective, but the impersonal world; human experience is determined mainly by factors that are external to humanity, and thus out of human control, subject merely to the divine intention. Qoheleth concentrates heavily on the issue of the unpredictability of divine action, yet, divine activity in the book is rarely direct; most often it is mediated by the divinely designed cosmos. At the heart of Qoheleth's wisdom lies a picture of a world which by the divine design has a natural tendency toward equilibrium between the negative and the positive. Within this equilibrium every single positive event has its corresponding negative counterpart and this pairing of events means that no substantial and lasting accomplishment is possible in life.[49] To some extent there is a similarity with the proverbial perspective, both being based on bipolar arrangement of the world. Yet, in contrast to the proverbial paradigm that revolves along an ethical dichotomy, the polarity postulated by Qoheleth is ethically neutral. This has

[48] This is particularly important where certain sayings stand in tension with each other. These should not be considered as contradictory, but rather as complementary, trying to express reality that is more complex than a single saying can capture.

[49] The details of this equilibrium will be expounded in chapter 3.

the necessary implication, that wisdom stemming from such an understanding is also ethically neutral, for it is about dealing with the ethically neutral world.[50]

The Aims of Qoheleth's Quest and Its Working Parameters

Determining the aim of Qoheleth's undertaking is slightly more complicated than in the case of Proverbs. Qoheleth's inquiry is initially introduced by the question *what profit is there for man in all his labour which he carries out under the sun* [Qoh 1:3]. This is a programmatic rhetorical question, which focuses the following discourse.[51] The key word of this question is יִתְרוֹן. This is more or less an accountant's term, referring to that which is left over when all the transactions are added up, a *profit*. It has to be pointed out that in itself יִתְרוֹן does not have any special theological significance in the book.[52] Rather than imposing some singular point of reference on יִתְרוֹן, one needs to appreciate that it is used in the book in two distinct contexts. On the one hand it refers to profit generated by a person's activities throughout their entire life, on the other hand it refers to a short-term profit, a gain associated with a particular undertaking in a particular time. In the case of the programmatic question יִתְרוֹן is modified by the phrase *in all his work*, indicating that the יִתְרוֹן about which Qoheleth is asking at this point is the result of adding up all of a person's undertaking which happens *under the sun*. The phrase *under the sun*, and the synonymous *under the heavens*, signifies in the book the spatial and temporal

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[50] Interestingly enough, Qoheleth considers the ethical neutrality, with which the same fate is applied to all, evil.

[51] Rhetorical questions can serve two distinct purposes. They can either be declarative, making a statement which is equivalent to the implied answer, or they can be introductory, serving as a headline focusing the following discourse. While in this case the reader has his suspicion what the answer to the question is to be (especially in the light of the preceding verse), it is my understanding that this question functions mainly as an introductory one and is thus, I believe, rightly identified by Ogden (1987b:28) as a programmatic question. I, however, disagree with Ogden's conclusion that this programmatic question applies to the entire book (see below).

[52] On this I wish to differ with Ogden (1987b:22-26) who understands יִתְרוֹן as referring to an advantage in the afterlife. This, however, does not square up with the way the word is used by Qoheleth. In particular, while Qoheleth is unable to shed any light on what happens after death, he is adamant that יִתְרוֹן cannot be obtained precisely because humans die [Qoh 3:18-21]. This places יִתְרוֹן firmly into the experience of the living.

sphere in which human life happens. It is exclusive to the living, the unborn have not yet entered the *under the sun* [Qoh 4:3], while the dead have no share in the *under the sun* anymore [Qoh 9:6]. When the *under the sun* is related to a single individual, as here, it basically means during one's lifetime. Therefore, from a closer examination of the question of Qoh 1:3, it becomes apparent that Qoheleth is enquiring at this point about some kind of profit one can produce over the span of human lifetime — the initial aim is a search for some absolute gain from life.[53]

However, Qoh 1:3 does not apply to the entire book. As the equilibrious picture of the world outlined above begins to emerge out of Qoheleth's inquiry in the first half of the book, it becomes obvious that no absolute and lasting advantage can be achieved; the balanced nature of the world precludes it. The ultimate conclusion with respect to the question of Qoh 1:3 reached by Qoheleth is summarised in the word הֶבֶל. This term poses serious difficulties to the translator, for there is no single English equivalent that would fully capture its sense and its precise significance has been widely debated. In my view the best analysis of the meaning is that of Miller (1998) who argues that הֶבֶל with its original meaning *vapour* is used by Qoheleth as a symbol that encapsulates the notions of insubstantiality, transience and foulness, summarising Qoheleth's evaluation of human experience.[54] In relationship to יִתְרוֹן and חֶסְרוֹן, surplus and deficit, הֶבֶל is Qoheleth's term for nothingness — human beings produce nothing of lasting value, whether positive or negative, there is no absolute יִתְרוֹן.

Yet, while the world leans toward the outlined equilibrium in the long-term run, it allows for temporary imbalance. Joy is not necessarily instantaneously followed by sorrow, just as most people do not die at the point of birth. The

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[53] It is worth noting at this point that once in the book [Qoh 1:15], we meet the antithetical word חֶסְרוֹן, *deficit*.

[54] This understanding, however, still does not resolve the problem of English rendering. Common translations include *meaningless* (NIV), *vanity* (RSV), *absurd* (e.g. Fox 1989) and one commentator even proposed a somewhat shocking, yet, not entirely inadequate, rendering *shit* (Crüsemann 1984). In the present work הֶבֶל will be rendered for the sake of consistence as *futile/futility*, which, albeit not entirely satisfactory, is in my view the best single English equivalent.

temporary asymmetry allows for a temporary gain, and so instead of being forced to abandon the search for יִתְרוֹן altogether, Qoheleth is able to refocus his enquiry. The original programme is transformed into a less ambitious one, captured by the question *who knows what is good for man while he is alive, during the limited number of days of his futile living* [Qoh 6:11].[55] It is within these redefined boundaries that the aim of Qoheleth's quest is found; Qoheleth is looking for ways to maximise any temporary success, at least to a degree.

What then does Qoheleth perceive as success in life? Similarly to Proverbs, material welfare is at the centre of Qoheleth's understanding of it. However, wealth *per se* is not identified with success, and it constitutes much less a mark of a person's status in Qoheleth's mind than it does in the proverbial association wise-wealthy. Qoheleth's principal emphasis is on the ability to enjoy one's resources, and any striving for possession is only 'legitimised' by the perspective of enjoyment; the effort to succeed and gain property is seen as a painful one and only the resulting enjoyment can make it worthwhile [Qoh 2:22-24]. Situations in which one is not able to enjoy the product of one's endeavour are perceived as deeply tragic [Qoh 6:1-3]. Thus, Qoheleth, just as Proverbs, does not advocate hoarding wealth for its own sake, it is only a means to an end. Indeed, excessive possessions have their pitfalls [Qoh 5:10-11], and it matters more to have a good reputation and maintain it throughout one's life [Qoh 7:1]. Further, Qoheleth does not perceive success in purely individualistic terms. Rather, he prefers situations where achievement and material resources can be enjoyed in the company of others, solitude is depressing and degrading [Qoh 4:6-12].

Again, we can see that the whole search that Qoheleth undertakes is driven by practical concerns. For Qoheleth, the value of knowledge is explicitly located in its practical benefits. In fact, in contrast to Proverbs, Qoheleth entirely relativises the

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[55] There are good reasons to believe that the original search for absolute advantage was never intended as a serious option, for instance the presence of the framing negative inclusio of Qoh 1:2 & 12:8 shows an immediate prejudice about fruitfulness of such a search. This broader-aimed quest was, however, a necessary starting point in developing the basic paradigm, and reflects Qoheleth's affinity with other wisdom texts.

value of wisdom as a mark of success; his perception of wisdom is nowhere near to the elevated imagery of Dame Wisdom as found in Prov 8. Wisdom is not much more for him than a tool through which one's resources can be manipulated and maintained [Qoh 7:11-12[56]], and it is entirely human in nature. Thus, while in certain contexts Qoheleth affirms the superiority of the combination wisdom/poverty to that of folly/wealth [Qoh 4:13], without access to the resources wisdom does not constitute success in Qoheleth's eyes [Qoh 6:7-9] and can be virtually worthless.

That, however, does not mean that Qoheleth rejects wisdom. On the contrary, he loathes folly [Qoh 10:2-3, 12-15]. On many an occasion he sees little difference between the fool and the wise, but not on a single one does he suggest that it is better to be a fool [e.g. Qoh 1:14; 9:16-18]; he identifies with the wise. To cover up the enigmatic and painful elements of human experience by ignorance satisfies him even less than having to admit the ultimate failure of wisdom. He chooses the frustration and pain of knowledge over the ease of inanity, and the epilogist grasps this, when he describes him as a sage [Qoh 12:9-10].

Qoheleth's wisdom is set within certain limiting boundaries. His investigation is based entirely on experience and the ability to experiment. He refuses to speculate about those issues that he personally cannot examine,[57] notably about the question of a meaningful afterlife and the possibility of achieving a lasting benefit from life beyond the point of death. As we will see later, he subscribes to the traditional OT

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[56] I prefer to render Qoh 7:11A 'wisdom *with* inheritance is good'. Crenshaw (1988:138) renders עִם by *as* on the basis of Qoh 2:16. However, in 2:16 the הַכֹּל indicates that the force of the thought is more associative than comparative. Since Qoheleth regularly uses כְּ to express comparison [e.g. Qoh 2:15] and there is no clear indication that comparison is intended, it is in my view better to render *with*. Fox (1989:231) quotes Job 9:26; 37:18 as examples of עִם used comparatively, but both cases are questionable. Ogden (1987b:108) adds the equivalence of *wisdom* and *money* in v. 12 as a supportive argument for reading *as*, but there clearly is no equivalence between wisdom and riches in Qoheleth's mind, he has stated previously [Qoh 6:7-9] that wisdom cannot guarantee riches. If v. 11 is rendered as suggested above, then it serves as a qualifying statement for the assertion of v. 12, where wisdom is not a guaranteed source of riches *per se*, but a suitable tool that can help to multiply and preserve riches. This is in harmony with the explicit affirmation of v. 12B that wisdom can preserve the life of those who possess it, which quite clearly is not intended as a claim that the wise do not die; wisdom is no more equivalent to riches than it is to life.

[57] Although on some occasions he is willing to extend the implications of his experience beyond what he personally can verify, this issue will be dealt with in the following chapter.

idea of Sheol, a shapeless existence in oblivion, but at the same time, he is aware of not being able to verify this understanding, and leaves the issue at least theoretically open. This should not, though, obscure from us the fact that the depiction of the world which he offers is strictly limited to the here-and-now; the points of birth and death are the basic boundaries within which Qoheleth's wisdom applies. This earth-bound, yet, cautious position should be respected. On the one hand it allows the reader to incorporate the book into belief-systems that may not entirely share Qoheleth's sceptical position, such as it was possible for the first century rabbis to include it among their canonical texts. On the other hand, it should also prevent the interpreter from imposing such external solutions as the concept of after-death judgement on the internal tensions within the book. It is only then that one can begin to get to grips with the person of Qoheleth and his world.

Adequacy of Qoheleth's Picture of the World

We find in the book a conviction that the quest for understanding cannot be completed, the world is not fully comprehensible and never will be because God intended for it not to be:

> Then I saw [concerning] every deed of God, that man is not able to find out the deed which is done under the sun, no matter how much man may work to find out, yet, he cannot find out, and even if the sage should say that he knows, he cannot find out. [Qoh 8:17][58]

The quote shows an acute awareness that the sage must be careful with what he claims. The specific expression of one's wisdom is always short of reality, and it is the reality which remains the ultimate object of Qoheleth's investigation. Qoheleth of all people is least in danger of confusing his theories with the tangible world.

Having seen that Qoheleth's search for understanding is driven by practical application from which the value of wisdom is solely derived, and having seen that he is aware that even the conclusions of his experience cannot be considered the final

[58] For textual notes see p. 160.

word, it is possible to say that Qoheleth's approach to wisdom is also paradigmatic in the sense defined earlier, even though the composition of the book is such that the process of progressing from observation to a paradigm is not always immediately obvious. The fact that this is what Qoheleth is doing can be illustrated by the following example where a specific case is turned into a general paradigm:

> There was a small city and few men in it, and a great king came to it, and surrounded it, and built against it massive ramparts.[59] And he found in it a poor man,[60] [who was][61] wise, and could have rescued[62] the city by his wisdom, but not a single man remembered this poor man. And I said: Wisdom is better than strength, but the wisdom of a poor person is despised, his words are not listened to. [Qoh 9:14-16]

It is apparent that Qoheleth's paradigm is different than that of Proverbs; the unqualified proverbial 'better' is replaced by 'better, but'. In other words, Qoheleth is greatly concerned with the exceptions to the paradigmatic generalisations and with the external constraints which limit the validity of such a paradigm, and this preoccupation with the exceptions brings his paradigmatic approach closer to an exact mode of knowing than is the case with Proverbs; there is a distinct sense in the book that Qoheleth stays with the paradigmatic approach only out of necessity, being convinced that exact knowing is not within human capabilities.

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[59] Reading with two Hebrew manuscripts, 𝔊, σ', 𝔖, 𝔗 מְצוּרִים.

[60] The subject of the verb is not clear. I am inclined to agree with Fox (1989:261-2) that the subject is the king from v. 14, but Fox's rendering *and in it he [the king] apprehended a man ... and he ... saved the city* is impossible in the context, because if the man was apprehended in the city, it had to be already taken — too late to be rescued. Driver (1954:231) proposes to read מָצָא pointing out the post-biblical מָצוֹי; such vocalisation is not implausible.

[61] Several Hebrew manuscripts and 𝔘 read *and wise*, most likely in an attempt to make the syntax clearer.

[62] Sx is commonly used to express unreal situations (see WOC 30.5.4). That this is the case here is indicated by the fact that what follows implies that the poor man's wisdom is not heeded. In particular, v. 16, which offers the generalised moral of the story, would make little sense if the city had been saved by this man (cf. Crenshaw 1988:166). Gordis (1955a:311) objects to such an understanding, claiming that זכר is not used in the sense to *think of*, but that is clearly the case in Qoh 11:8; 12:1. Fox's (1989:263) objection that זכר always refers to recalling a fact which is already known and cannot be used in the sense of paying attention to a new fact/advice is irrelevant here, because Qoheleth does not say that no-one remembered his advice, but that no-one remembered his person (cf. Qoh 12:1).

The Reversibility of Qoheleth's Paradigm

The question of reversibility, so essential to the book of Proverbs, does not really apply to Qoheleth's paradigm. This is given by its nature. While the proverbial paradigm is based on the assumption that the world can be predicted with a reasonable degree of accuracy and the outcome can be influenced by choice of action, Qoheleth's model centres around the assumption that apart from the tendency toward equilibrium the world is stochastic. Qoheleth's paradigm is not about forecasting what will happen, but about making the most of the events that one cannot predict or control; the question of causality, i.e., why something that already happened took place, is not one that Qoheleth asks outside of the positive-negative polarity.

Formal Expression of the Paradigm

The most notable formal feature of the book is the epilogue; the approach that will be taken here in this respect has already been outlined in the Introduction. What has been said earlier with reference to the proverbial forms, concerning the inherent performative nature of language, applies fully to Qoheleth; his observations tend to imply some kind of a personal judgment even when it is not explicitly stated. In fact, the framing inclusio of Qoh 1:2 and 12:8 indicates very clearly that Qoheleth is ultimately going to pass judgement on the entirety of human experience.

The book employs a number of different forms to get its reasoning across. Among these are the traditional wisdom saying and a pseudo-autobiographical narrative. While the text does not contain a singular smooth line of reasoning and the style is somewhat disjointed, it shows a significant formal uniformity both in terms of vocabulary and the way arguments are constructed. In the light of that it is not, in my view, likely that we should look in the core of book for voices with different ideologies as a way to explain the internal tension. Rather, we should perceive these tensions as an expression of a life-experience in a real world.

It can be further observed that the formal nature of the material between the two sections of the book differs. The first six chapters are largely characterised by a first person discourse in an indicative mood, while the second half of the book employs a large number of second person verbal forms, mainly absent from the first half of the book, including a number of command forms (see Appendix C). This leads to the conclusion that the two sections have a different function. In the first half of the book Qoheleth develops his understanding of the world from his personal experience, while in the second half he relates his observations to the reader. Thus, in spite of the possible initial impression of chaos, the book has a certain definite flow of thought and intent, one which culminates in the final paragraphs, from which the persona of Qoheleth disappears entirely and the reader becomes the sole focus of the discourse. This shows quite clearly that in the final analysis Qoheleth is just as interested in making people behave in a certain manner, as the proverbial sages are.

Summary

I have shown so far that the basic approach of both Proverbs and Qoheleth is paradigmatic in the sense defined earlier in this chapter, i.e., the two books have primarily pragmatic concerns and offer a consciously simplified picture of reality. This conclusion is contrary to Golka's (1993:114-16) view that wisdom uses principally the same method as modern science. It is precisely attempts to see wisdom from the point of view of modern science and its methods that resulted in the very low esteem for wisdom, and particularly Proverbs, in critical scholarship; the paradigms offered by the two books have to be treated as simplifications and approximations that are intended for a specific purpose and are meant to operate under certain conditions.[63]

[63] The paradigmatic nature of the wisdom enterprise should not be confused with the issue of the authority of wisdom. Namely, it should not be surmised that Proverbs or Qoheleth are not intended to be authoritative because they are paradigmatic. In fact, sometimes it is asserted that wisdom amounts

Continued on the following page

It is clear from the outline of the two perspectives presented above, that the two paradigms are quite different, and that the differences are not merely in minute details, but in matters of substance, as will emerge even more clearly in the following chapters. Yet, this should not obscure from us the fact that, in spite of the differences, behind both books lie quests that share a number of similarities. In most general terms, both books are driven by practical concerns, they revolve around an understanding of the world and the place that human beings have in it, and have the same basic aim, to foster successful life, conceiving of such a success in similar terms. Thus, in other words, the two books have identical points of departure, identical goals and similar overall approach to achieving these. The earlier suggested definition of the quest we find in Proverbs and Qoheleth can, therefore, be further narrowed as *the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator and self-realisation in the context of these relationships, based on a paradigmatic approach to understanding.*

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to nothing more than a body of good advice that one may want to consider following. While wisdom is not a legal system with penalties applied externally for lack of compliance with it, obedience to the wisdom paradigm is nevertheless not portrayed as optional, nor do we gain the perception from our books that the paradigm can be applied selectively. While the authority of the paradigm is limited to it being applied within its intended working parameters, within that boundary its acceptance is assumed to be unconditional. This is very clear in Proverbs in the authoritative and non-compromising speeches of Dame Wisdom and the clear-cut bipolar image of the world. It is equally true of Qoheleth, whose paradigm is no less ambiguous and who gives no indication that he expects the reader to pick and choose what he or she likes. The sages considered theirs to be a serious and important business expecting it to be taken seriously. This is fully in line with the hints elsewhere in the OT that wisdom enjoyed a great degree of authority, e.g., the reputation of Ahithophel [2 Sam 16:23] at David's court.

Chapter 2

HOW DOES THE SAGE KNOW?

In the previous chapter I argued that the wisdom undertaking is pragmatic, with paradigm being its primary mode of thought. The paradigm is the conceptual end-product of the quest for practical understanding of the world pursued by the sages; its formulation is preceded by a twofold undertaking, consisting of the collection of data followed by its assessment. By 'assessment' I do not mean here the process of drawing conclusions from the data, for in that sense I prefer to talk of formulation of the paradigm. Rather, by assessment I mean a process through which a value is given to that which is observed; essentially a method through which differences between separate observations are handled and through which it is decided that a particular observation should be included in, or may need to be excluded from, the formulation of the paradigm itself. Both the methods used to collect and assess data are an essential part of any epistemology, and while in our case the latter may not be overtly explicit, it nevertheless constitutes a critical part of the sages' worldview.

The Epistemological Perspective of Proverbs

Direct Observation

The first method of collecting data found in the book is by personal observation, although it should be noted that in Proverbs direct observation is presented as the source of the sages' knowledge only on a limited number of

occasions. It is usually marked by the presence of 1cs form of the verb ראה. A prime example is found in Prov 7:

> Say to Wisdom: 'you are my sister,' and call understanding a relative —to keep you from a strange woman, from the foreign woman, who makes her words smooth. For through the window of my[1] house, through my shutters I was looking down, and I saw among the immature, I noticed among the sons,[2] a boy who lacked sense. Crossing the street by her corner, and step by step heading[3] in the direction of her house … And behold, the woman [comes] to meet him … She seduced him by her persuasiveness, by the smoothness of her lips she beguiled him. He follows her in an instant,[4] like an ox to the slaughter he keeps on going,[5] … for he does not know [that] with his life he [will pay]. And now sons, listen to me, and pay attention to the words of my mouth. Do not turn your mind in her direction, do not stagger by mistake onto her paths. For she caused the fall of many corpses, and those she killed are numerous. Paths to[6] Sheol are her house, descending to the chambers of death. [Prov 7:4-27]

The father's insight into what happens to a youth who falls prey to a strange woman is based on his personal knowledge of a case of such a young man in the past. This particular case is now generalised into a paradigm in which association with such a woman leads to destruction and death.[7] A similar type of observation is found in Prov 24:

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[1] 𝔊, 𝔖 have the whole of the following narrative in 3fs. The difference is probably stylistic rather than textual, the 𝔐 version with the three narrative planes (that of the father, of the characters and of the addressees) is much more dynamic and preferable.

[2] Omitted by versions, most likely due to haplography with אֲבִינָה.

[3] The Px has here a past iterative sense which creates a special dramatic effect; the observer hangs on each step of the youth with anticipation.

[4] 𝔐 פִּתְאֹם; 𝔊 κεπφωθείς, *to be cajoled*, i.e., פתה; 𝔖 ܐܬܒܗܬ ܥܠܝ, i.e., reading פִּתִּי and adding כְּ on the analogy of the following כְּשׁוֹר, but this is unlikely to be the correct reading since the character *is* פִּתִּי not just *like* פִּתִּי.

[5] 𝔐 יָבוֹא; 𝔊 ἄγεται, possibly reading Hophal, *is led*. I prefer the 𝔐 active voice to the 𝔊 passive, for the point being made here is that the boy fails to put up any resistance; the emphasis is on the boy's actions.

[6] Hebrew has a construct relationship here.

[7] I disagree with Fox's (1987:146) view that the father's conclusions are not derived from observation, but are based on prior knowledge. While the father could be regarded as reporting the outcome without observing it, and thus relying on prior knowledge, it is better to understand the shift from past to present (v. 22) and future (v. 23) as the result of a difference between the story time and the narrative time, the latter being delayed against the former. The narrative time is chosen so that the present, i.e., the most vivid, section appears at the critical moment of the narrative, when the point of no return is crossed. Instead of leaving the story with the primary focus on the consequences, the reader is left to contemplate mainly what led to the critical twist in the plot, which is what the narrator intends, as is clearly indicated by the imperatives of v. 25 — the primary role of the story is preventative. Further, the father's claim that *she has caused the fall of many* [v. 26], indicates clearly that the whole paradigm relies on reoccurring experience, so that even if some prior knowledge is used here in evaluating the story, it is based on observation of the same type.

> I crossed over a field of a lazy man, and over a vineyard of a man with no sense. And look: all over it weeds were coming up, chickweed covered its surface, and its stone wall was breached. And I observed and I took it to my heart, I saw and I learned a lesson: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to lie down, and your poverty comes like a tinker, and your need like a shielded warrior. [Prov 24:30-34][8]

The process through which the observation is turned into a paradigm is directly described in v. 33, with the paradigm expressed in v. 34: laziness, even in small doses, leads to impoverishment which, once it takes hold, is extremely difficult to overcome.

Sometimes the paradigm applicable to human behaviour is built from an observation that lies outside of human society. Consider the well known passage from Prov 6:

> Go to the ant, sluggard, see its ways and be wise. Although it does not have a leader, officer or ruler, it prepares its bread in the summer, it gathered its food in the harvest time. How long, you sluggard, will you lie down, when will you get up from your sleep? Little sleep [here and there],[9] little rest [here and there], little folding[10] of hands to lie down, and your poverty will come in like a tinker,[11] and your need like a shielded warrior.[12] [Prov 6:6-11]

From our modern perspective, the world of the ant is not directly related to the world of humans, at least not to the extent that we would readily consider the behaviour of the ant as a model for human conduct. Human intellect is almost invariably seen as the ultimate pinnacle of knowledge in today's world, and a certain epistemological leap is necessary to draw conclusions about humans from observations of other creatures; such observations might be used as secondary illustrations of a particular concept, but rarely would they be the source of the idea itself. While at first glance it might seem that the same is true in the case above, there are indications that the reference to the ant here is much more serious than a mere illustration. The proposed exercise in studying the behaviour of the ant is not some momentary and superficial

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[8] For textual notes see p. 143.
[9] Note the extensive pl. שְׁנוֹת.
[10] מ חִבֻּק; Rabin (1949) suggested that, since Qal is the only stem in which the root has the meaning *to fold*, this is not a noun but a Qal pass. ptc. (with doubling used to preserve the long vowel). *Hands* then are a genitive of specification, i.e., folded with respect to hands.
[11] See note 32 on p. 143.
[12] See note 33 on p. 143.

observation, but rather a long term study that spans several seasons and the assertions that are made on basis of this observation indicate some significant insight into the behaviour of the ant collective. It is, therefore, necessary to conclude that the speaking sage studied the ants systematically and in some detail. We find a number of other places with a similar thrust:

> These three things are hidden from me, and four I do not comprehend: the path of the vulture in the skies, the path of a snake on a rock, the path of a ship in the heart of the sea, and the path of a man with a marriageable woman.[13] [Prov 30:18-19]
>
> These four are small [creatures] of earth, and they are wiser[14] than sages. The ants are not a strong people, but they prepare their food in the summer. Rock badgers are not numerous people, but they set their house in rock. Locusts have no king, but all of them come out in ranks. A gecko can be caught[15] with two hands, yet, he is in royal palaces. [Prov 30:24-28]
>
> These three stroll elegantly and four walk well: the lion, the mightiest among animals, who does not turn from before anyone. Swaggering cock or he-goat, and king ??? among his people.[16] [Prov 30:29-31]

In all of these texts the understanding of the animal world is a serious business on a par with understanding the human world. In fact Prov 30:24 affirms explicitly that other creatures possess wisdom which is in no way inferior to that of the sages and can provide them with insight. In other words, these passages show that the world of the sages is a coherent and unified whole, of which human beings are a part, one of many. There is no deep dichotomy between the human sphere and the animal kingdom — the patterns and phenomena observed in nature are applied to human life without hesitation.[17]

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[13] 𝔐 בְּעַלְמָה; 𝔊 ἐν νεότητι, *in youth*, but that does not necessarily imply difference in text, since νεότης can have a personal reference, albeit usually collective (see L&S).

[14] 𝔐 מְחֻכָּמִים; reading מְזֻכָּמִים with KBL^2, cf. 𝔊 σοφώτερα τῶν σοφῶν.

[15] 𝔐 תְּתַפֵּשׂ; reading passive with 𝔊.

[16] The Hebrew text of the verse is clearly corrupted. 𝔊 καὶ ἀλέκτωρ ἐμπεριπατῶν θηλείαις εὔψυχος καὶ τράγος ἡγούμενος αἰπολίου καὶ βασιλεὺς δημηγορῶν ἐν ἔθνει, *and a rooster walking courageously [among] hens and a he-goat leading a herd, and a king addressing a nation*. It is however likely that this is simply an interpretation of an obscure Hebrew text as preserved in 𝔐. Bewer (1948:61) proposed to emend on the grounds of 𝔊 אוֹ מָתְנַיִם to מִתְנַשֵּׂא, מֶלֶךְ to מֹלֵךְ, אַלְקוֹם to אֵיל מְקֻדָּם, rendering *the strutting cock and the leading he-goat, the leader marching in front of his people*. Although, in light of the extensive corruption of text, all reconstructions are tentative, that the reference is being made to animals is clear.

[17] For a wider examination of the relationship between humanity and the rest of the creation in OT wisdom see Dell (1994a).

Collective Experience

Alongside direct observations as the source of knowledge, we find that the wise also gathered information indirectly from the experience of others. In fact, learning and teaching, rather than experiencing first hand, is the primary mode of data-acquisition in Proverbs. When stating that the book is intended to give knowledge [Prov 1:2], the introduction quite clearly implies that knowledge can be passed on. The father in Prov 7 (quoted above) does not exhort the listeners to go and watch a case of a youth involved with a strange woman in order to learn the same lesson he has learned; he assumes that his observation can serve as a reliable foundation for the young men to draw their own conclusions. A similar assumption lies behind all the other speeches of Prov 1-9 by the father, the grand-father[18] and Wisdom herself. The distinction between personal and communicated experience may seem to be minute, but for the understanding of the overall epistemological perspective of the book it is crucial. From the sages' point of view, human experience is not subjective, but rather, it is perceived as an objective reality. What one person observes is applicable to other people. Consequently, the search for understanding in Proverbs is a collective undertaking; the simple are to learn from the wiser [e.g. Prov 12:15; 13:20] and the wise learn from each other [Prov 1:5].

Place of Revelation

While the two experiential modes of data-acquisition are by far the most pronounced in the book, we come across a few statements that quite manifestly do not come from such human sources. The most striking example is the speech of Wisdom in Prov 8:22ff. The insights into the process of creation that this passage claims to offer are not acquired by human experience, but are being *revealed* to humans by the mysterious female figure. I will leave the question of her identity for the following chapter, and instead will focus at present solely on her function in the

[18] See note 40 on p. 42.

process of obtaining knowledge. She appears on three occasions in Prov 1-9 [Prov 1:20ff; 8:1ff; 9:1ff], on all of which she addresses the listeners with more or less an identical message, captured in the following passage:

> Blessed is the man who listens to me, [who] keeps watch at my doors day after day, [who] guards the door-posts of my doorway. For who finds me, has found life, and received favour from Yahweh. But who sins against me does violence to his soul, and all who hate me love death. [Prov 8:34-36][19]

Essentially, she is admonishing the youths, whose identity was discussed in the previous chapter, to accept her instruction asserting that doing so will lead to prosperous life while ignoring her will mean sure destruction.

The role that Wisdom plays is indicated by the way Prov 8:22-36 is structured. There are two main sections, Prov 8:22-29 and 8:32-36, the former dealing with Wisdom's presence during the process of creation, the latter is Wisdom's call for attention. These two sections are joined by janus verses 30 and 31, in which the thought essentially progresses from Wisdom before Yahweh to humanity before Wisdom; just as Wisdom is Yahweh's delight, so humanity is Wisdom's delight. In other words, Wisdom functions as a mediatrix between Yahweh and humanity, linking the enigmatic divine world which we get a glimpse of in vv. 22-29 with the tangible world the young men live in. The relationship between humanity and Wisdom is in a sense an image of the relationship between Yahweh and herself; she wishes to find delight in humanity, just as Yahweh finds delight in her. Thus, following her means pleasing Yahweh with all the associated blessing necessary for life; rejecting her ultimately amounts to making an enemy of Yahweh with all the deadly repercussions.

Having concluded that she has a mediating function, what then is it that she mediates?

> 'To you men, I call, and to humanity my voice [is directed]. [You] immature, understand prudence! And you fools, get sense! Listen, because I speak

[19] For translation and textual notes see p. 90.

> <important things>[20] and opening of my lips: that which is right. For my pallet utters truth and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.[21] All the words of my mouth are in righteousness, there is no twistedness, no crookedness among them. All of them are straight to the one who understands, and upright to those who seek knowledge. Accept my instruction in place of silver and knowledge in place of choice gold. … I, Wisdom dwell [with][22] prudence, [with] knowledge,[23] discretion I keep meeting.[24] Fear of Yahweh is to hate evil; I hate arrogance and pride and an evil way, and a perverse mouth. I have got advice and <insight>, I am[25] understanding, I have got strength. … I love those who love me, and those who seek me do find me. Riches and glory are with me, splendid[26] wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, and than chrysolite, and my produce [is better] than choice silver. I walk[27] in the path of righteousness and in the middle of tracks of judgement. To make those who love me inherit property, and I fill their storehouses. [Prov 8:4-14, 17-21]

Essentially she provides *correct* understanding of the world, one needed to please God and succeed. It is, therefore, necessary to differentiate between Wisdom, the persona, and wisdom as knowledge or intellectual capacity. The sages believed that God created the world intelligently, i.e., by wisdom and by understanding [Prov 3:19], and it is this intelligent design that Dame Wisdom discloses to humanity.[28] She is a source of knowledge and understanding, but she cannot be identified with it. If she is to be seen in terms of knowledge, then she is knowledge *par excellence*, ideal and absolute, unlimited and undiluted, and most importantly, existing independently of

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[20] Precise meaning uncertain. 𝔐 נְגִידִים, *rulers*, presumably used in a metaphorical manner; 𝔊 σεμνὰ, *holy things*; 𝔖 ܫܪܪ̈ܐ, *true*. Oesterley (57) proposes to emend to נְכֹחִים, which could account for 𝔐 via an audible error.

[21] 𝔊 (preferred by Toy, 162) ἐβδελυγμένα δὲ ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ χείλη ψευδῆ, *deceitful lip is an abomination to me*, but this is probably due to the translator's difficulties with the syntax. The parallel with 7A and 8A, where the concern is with Wisdom's utterances, speaks strongly for retaining 𝔐.

[22] Delitzsch (177) understands *prudence* in sense of location, *I inhabit prudence*, but it is more likely that prudence, knowledge and discretion are all personified here and presented as Dame Wisdom's companions.

[23] Possibly *knowledge of discretion* (cf. McKane 1970:347).

[24] 𝔐 אֶמְצָא, Px with a habitual sense; 𝔊 ἐπεκαλεσάμην, *I call*, i.e., *I invite;* 𝔖 ܫܒܩ ܩܢܝ, *I acquired*, supports 𝔐 root, the choice of tense is more likely interpretative than textual. McKane (1970:222) *I find out the right procedures*, but in the light of 12A *knowledge* and *discretion* are better understood as personifications.

[25] Versions read *I have*, but that is most likely levelling of the text, although the difference could also be a result of an audible error confusing אֲנִי with עִמִּי.

[26] So KBL[3].

[27] Hebrew has Piel, focusing on the state of affairs rather than the activity *per se*.

[28] That *wisdom* in Prov 3:19 is not Dame Wisdom is implied by the fact that Dame Wisdom of Prov 8 plays no active role in the process of creation, the only assertion that the text makes is that she was present during it.

and outwith the creation. However, I will argue in the following chapter that she is more than this.[29]

Within the narrative strategy of Proverbs, the knowledge which Dame Wisdom offers is to be identified with the contents of the book. Proverbs can be divided into four collections, which can be labelled as Solomon I (Prov 1-24), Solomon II (Prov 25-29), Agur (Prov 30) and Lemuel (Prov 31).[30] Solomon I contains a brief superscription [Prov 1:1-7] stating the purpose of the collection, an extensive introduction [Prov 1:8-9:18] meant to motivate the פֶּתִי, followed by three sub-collections of proverbial material [Prov 10-22:16; 22:17-24:22; 24:23-34]. The initial superscription indicates that wisdom is to be found in the מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה. Within this context it appears natural that when Dame Wisdom first emerges at Prov 1:20, the knowledge she offers to mediate should be identified with Solomon's wisdom. At this point we have to appreciate that according to the biblical tradition, Solomon's wisdom was of divine origin. While it is often argued that it is the status of Solomon as a divinely endowed sage that accounts for the attribution of the proverbial material to him, the direct link between this divinely imparted wisdom of 1 Kgs 3:10-12, and the infallible understanding mediated by Dame Wisdom frequently goes unnoticed.

I, therefore, wish to suggest that the speeches of Dame Wisdom in Proverbs are a poetic representation of the revelatory process through which Solomon was endowed by wisdom in the story from 1 Kgs 3. However, there is no doubt that the reader of Proverbs is to think that Wisdom is speaking through the entire book,

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[29] The perception that Wisdom is in principle a mediator of divine knowledge is not new. From early on, the Jewish tradition understood Wisdom as the Torah; a well known instance of this identification is found in Ben Sira 24. The main problem with this identification lies in the fact that the proverbial material lacks the Israelite specificity associated with the Torah and that the book fails to make this identification explicit. At the same time it should not be dismissed simply as an attempt to reconcile Yahwistic traditions concerning salvation history with wisdom traditions in which salvation on a national level plays no role whatsoever, as does, for instance, von Rad (1972:164-66). In fact, Ben Sira's explanation shows a great degree of sensitivity to the issues involved. Torah, as the divine revelation and key to understanding the world and the place of humans in it, fits the profile of Dame Wisdom, which will be examined in the next chapter, rather well. (The tension that von Rad perceives is the direct result of his choice of national salvation as the central notion for formulating his OT theology.)

[30] For an extensive argument for such a division, including comparative evidence see Kitchen (1977).

including the material which is not labelled as Solomonic.[31] Consequently, the activity of this female figure cannot be limited to revelation that Solomon alone received. Rather, this particular case of divine revelation and illumination appears to be a specific example *par excellence* of a more general process in which God imparts understanding. In other words, the sages believed that in their striving for wisdom God provided them with a special insight, one that was deemed to reach beyond what the human mind alone was able to grasp through its natural abilities, essentially allowed the sages to see things from the divine perspective. To the young addressees of Proverbs this type of divine revelation is presented in the poetic terms of intimate relationship with a female companion, Dame Wisdom.

Having established that divine revelation plays a part in the proverbial epistemology, it is necessary to consider the mechanics of the revelatory process. At first it might seem that this revelation is not tied to any particular locality. Wisdom is speaking at a variety of public places: squares, open spaces, near paths, crossroads, at city gates. It should, however, be noted that on none of these occasions does she actually offer the insight she promises. Rather, she only gives out invitations to come and receive such insight, i.e., the insight is not found at the public places where she speaks, it is located elsewhere. This is most blatant in the third appearance of Wisdom found in Prov 9. Here, she sends out her maids to distribute invitations in a public manner that resembles what we find in Prov 1 and 8, but the actual revelation, represented here by the image of food and drink at the banquet she prepared, is going to happen inside the house she built; it requires that the invitees follow her to the place of her choice and design. Thus, what really emerges from these calls is far from a universal and unconditional revelation of truth to the human race for which they are sometimes taken. Rather, the relationship to which Wisdom invites her listeners bares an uncanny resemblance to the concept of discipleship as it appears often with

[31] Here I am not concerned with the question to what extent these superscriptions are historical data. My sole concern is with the perception of the material as it was shaped into the present form of the book. It is clear that at least some of the material in Proverbs was understood to have originated outside Israel, e.g., the material ascribed to Agur and the mother of Lemuel.

reference to the prophets in the OT or John the Baptist and Jesus in the NT; the address is public but only the initiates have access to the full teaching.

Can more details about the character of the wisdom discipleship be derived from our text? Some insight into the nature of Wisdom's house and her banquet is found in the second half of Wisdom's speech in Prov 9:

> Who corrects a mocker receives insult and who rebukes the wicked [receives] harm.[32] Do not rebuke a mocker, lest he hates you, rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Give to the wise and he will be even wiser, teach the righteous and he will add to his learning. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh, and the knowledge of the Holy One[33] is understanding. For with me[34] your days will multiply and years of life will be added to you. [Prov 9:7-11]

It has been argued that Prov 9:7-11 represents a later addition to the material, or that it originally belonged to a different part of the book.[35] While this is possible and even likely, I am inclined to think that the material has been placed at its present location intentionally, in order to elucidate the nature of the banquet. The feast is envisaged as an opportunity for the wise and righteous to withdraw from the company of the incorrigible mockers and to mutually correct and educate each other. It is difficult to avoid the impression that the house of wisdom is an image for a more formal educational gathering.

There is a further aspect of the picture of wisdom painted in the opening nine chapters, as well as in the following sayings, which is directly relevant to the considerations about the significance of the house of Wisdom. The son is encouraged repeatedly to acquire wisdom at all costs. Consider the following texts:

> Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding,[36] do not forget and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not abandon her, and she will keep you, love

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[32] The parallelism between the colons suggests that מוּמוֹ is equivalent to לֵקֵחַ לוֹ קָלוֹן, the verb being gapped and the preposition with suffix replaced by nominal suffix alone.

[33] The parallelism suggests this is a plural of majesty, but see also the discussion in the next chapter on p. 93.

[34] Versions seem to have read *with her*, but this is still part of the direct speech by wisdom.

[35] See the discussion in Whybray (1994a:43-48).

[36] The beginning of the verse is missing in some 𝔊 manuscripts, however, it is required by the 3fs sfx in v. 6.

> her, and she will guard you. [37]Wisdom is the best — acquire wisdom, and for all your possessions acquire understanding. [Prov 4:5-7]
>
> Blessed is a man [who] has found wisdom, and a man who meets[38] [with] understanding. For her gain is better than the gain of silver and her [produce] is better than produce of pure gold. She is more precious than corals,[39] nothing you may desire can equal her. [Prov 3:13-15].
>
> What are finances for in the hand of a fool — to get wisdom? But he has no sense! [Prov 17:16]

Wisdom is quite clearly perceived in these passages as a commodity, which on the one hand has a value that cannot be expressed in material terms, yet, at the same time, can be acquired for money. Since knowledge is a thoroughly abstract concept, in order to become a commodity it has to be materialised in some fashion. There are only two ways in which this can occur, either through an object, such as a written text, or through a person. In these two forms it becomes a commodity, in terms of the cost necessary to pay for the object or to the person. In societies such as ancient Israel, where production of written records is labour-intensive, slow and ultimately expensive, the teacher always remains the primary source of knowledge. Consequently, the present references to purchasing wisdom can hardly be understood otherwise than largely as allusions to learning from a person for a tuition fee. In other words, the book is aware of education with a commercial basis. Within that context it appears reasonable to understand the house of wisdom, and the seclusion it provides to those, and only those, who choose to join in, as referring to a school.[40]

The existence of schools in ancient Israel is widely debated.[41] The main objection to postulating some formal school system lies in the fact that unequivocal archaeological evidence pointing in that direction is lacking, and that there are no obvious references to schools in the OT. This is indeed strange if ancient Israel had a

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[37] The entire v. 7 is missing in 𝔊, probably due to the syntactical difficulties it presents.
[38] Note the shift from the gnomic Sx in the A colon to the habitual Px in B colon.
[39] Reading Q supported by versions. The precise meaning is uncertain, but the sometimes adopted rendering *rubies* is probably incorrect since it appears that rubies were not known in ANE (Oesterley 23).
[40] When the term school is used here, it should not be understood in terms of education of small children. The book is addressed not to a child but to a young man, as is quite clear in the exhortations of the opening chapters that are to do with marriage and extramarital sexual relationships.
[41] For a recent survey of the discussion see Weeks (1995:132-56).

developed and widespread system of schools. However, it is not necessary to envisage any extensive educational system. Even the existence of a single school, in Jerusalem for instance, would be sufficient to make sense of the observed data. Further, the following issues must be taken into consideration. First, ancient Israel possessed a sufficient degree of literacy to produce the texts of the Hebrew bible, many of which demonstrate great skill. It is one thing to say that a 22 letter alphabet could be learned easily and without formal schooling, and another matter entirely to claim that poetic and literary skills demonstrated in the OT evolved without any co-ordinated effort and were widespread.[42] A high level of literary skills can only be obtained by extensive first-hand experience, which is something that is unlikely to have been readily available in a society whose life was centred around labour-intensive and low-return agriculture and farming. Second, the royal court would have a need for literate clerks, in the running of both its domestic and international affairs, and, in fact scribes do appear on the lists associated with royal administration.[43] The degree of literacy that the court would require, especially for handling its foreign affairs, could hardly be gained without intensive educational effort. It is, therefore, my view that the existence of some formal educational system, at least alongside the royal court, is highly probable even in the absence of any corroborating archaeological evidence.[44]

However, suggesting that the house of seven pillars is in fact some kind of a school is not the same as claiming that Proverbs *per se* is a school text, or, that the whole of the wisdom quest is to be set in a formal educational setting. There are clear

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[42] Even the claim about literacy being easily acquired due to the simplicity of the alphabet, made for instance by Weeks (1995:151), is questionable. Modern-day experience shows that in societies that do not have sufficient formal schooling the proportion of literacy in the population is low. This is in spite of the fact that the wide availability of written materials in printed form creates conditions for literacy that are greatly superior to that of ancient pre-press societies.

[43] For instance 2 Sam 8:16-18; 20:24-25; 1 Kgs 4:3; 2 Kgs 18:18.

[44] The similarities between the wisdom banquet and the passages to do with purchasing wisdom on the one hand and Sir 51:23-28 on the other are noteworthy, especially since the latter passage is the earliest clear witness to schools in Israel. I would not be surprised if בֵּית חָכְמָה was in fact a formal designation for a school, one which would have been understood by the early reader, and upon which the imagery of Prov 9 was built.

indications that the centre of the instruction in Proverbs is in the family, as I will argue in chapter 5. The overall picture is of a young man under the instruction of both of his parents but primarily of his father, who is being presented with an invitation to come to a wisdom banquet in the house of seven pillars. Therefore, I wish to suggest that we meet here the young man at a significant milestone in his life. He has been informally trained within the context of his family but is now encouraged to pursue wisdom in a more intensive manner, outside of the family circle. Such a background makes good sense of the repeated exhortations not to abandon the basic instruction of the parents, as well as the stress on the necessity to purchase wisdom and the numerous references to the desirability of association with the wise.

The real epistemological significance of the banquet in the house of seven pillars is not so much in the fact that it points to a possible link between the wisdom undertaking and formal education, but that it shows very clearly that the revelatory element of the process of gaining wisdom does not happen on an individual level, but in the context of a community, through dialogue of the wise. As this communal aspect of the wisdom quest is also predominant in the non-revelatory data acquisition of the sages, it prevents us from understanding the proverbial quest for wisdom as an individualistic and self-centred search for knowledge and success; the epistemology of proverbial wisdom is characterised by community orientation.[45]

While dealing with the place of divine revelation in Proverbs, a brief note concerning the cult is needed. There are at least couple of occasions in the book where reference to revelation within the cult is made:

> Who turns[46] his ear from hearing/obeying the Law, also his prayer is an abomination. [Prov 28:9]
>
> When there is no vision,[47] people go loose, but who keeps the Law is blessed. [Prov 29:18]

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[45] The community orientation is not limited to the epistemology, as will become even more obvious in chapter 4.

[46] S ותשמחנו, the root שמח means *to refrain, restrain*, and so there is no reason to assume, as BHS suggests, that S was reading anything else than M.

It is generally difficult to determine whether the term תּוֹרָה is used in the book with reference to human instruction or whether it is used with the religious significance the term often has in other parts of the OT. However, the context suggests that on these two occasions it is likely the latter. While it would be possible to understand the word in the former sense in the first of the passages, the resulting link between the two colons is loose and weak. The rendering adopted here creates much stronger parallelism, picturing two way communication between a person and God. In the second passage quoted תּוֹרָה is paralleled to חָזוֹן, which is a term for prophetic revelation. In that context it is unlikely that תּוֹרָה was intended otherwise than as a reference to divine instruction. Overall, though, the cult plays no significant role in the proverbial epistemology; we shall see the reasons for this in the following chapter.

Evaluating Experience

Having looked at the means through which the sages gathered their data, it remains to add a brief note on the way they assessed their observations. One of the obvious features of the book is the fact that it describes the world, rather than contemplates it in a great depth; it is much more about searching for patterns than trying to understand these patterns in detail. As has been pointed out earlier, one can discern in the book a conviction about the objective value of human experience. This objectivity is quite clearly understood not only in synchronic terms, but also diachronically; the past experience of the grandfather is of the same value, if not higher, than that of the father himself. In fact, experience that has been collectively accumulated takes priority over the immediate experience of an individual; the present is to be evaluated in the terms of the past, the narrower picture in terms of the large one. While, as I have argued in the previous chapter, there is the awareness that what is being presented is a simplified portrayal of reality, there is the strong and

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[47] 𝔐 חָזוֹן; 𝔊 understood this personally rendering ἐξηγητες.

unmistakable conviction that on the larger scale the paradigm ultimately works and no indication is given that at any future date the paradigm might need serious reconsidering. The cumulative experience of successive generations becomes the standard from which the value of any present experience is drawn. That which conforms to the existing paradigm lends it further support, while behind that which appears to contradict it must be some additional reasons that cause the apparent discrepancy. The following text can serve as an example of that:

> Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding, know him in all your ways, and he will straighten your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes — fear Yahweh and turn away from evil. There will be healing to your body[48] and refreshment[49] to your bones. Honour Yahweh from your wealth and from the choicest [part] of all your produce — and your stores will be filled abundantly,[50] and your presses will burst with new wine. As for Yahweh's discipline, my son, do not reject [it] and do not loathe [it] when he rebukes you. For whom Yahweh loves he rebukes,[51] but like a father[52] he delights in his son. [Prov 3:5-12]

Verses 5-10 outline the basic proverbial perspective: fear God and all will be well. The final two verses are of a greater interest to us, for they clearly suggest that in fact what has just been said is not always true. Experience that diverges from the paradigm is in this particular instance seen through theological glasses; the unpleasant is understood as discipline that is part of divine love, and ultimately, approval.

The belief in objectivity of human experience and the conviction that the search for wisdom is divinely inspired are closely linked. Within the proverbial

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[48] Reading לִשְׁאֵרֶךָ with 𝔊 and 𝔖; 𝔐 לְשָׁרֶךָ, *to your naval string*. Driver (1951b:175) argues from the cognate languages for existence of root שׁהר, *healing*, but in the light of the fact that in our passage the word is parallel עַצְמוֹתֶיךָ and not שִׁקּוּי, such reading is implausible.

[49] שִׁקּוּי denotes more specifically a drink, e.g. Ps 102:10, Oesterley (20).

[50] 𝔐 שָׂבָע; 𝔊 σίτου, possibly reflecting שֶׁבֶר in the Vorlage either in place of, or in addition to שָׂבָע, but in the light of the beat the former alternative is preferable. Toy (62) prefers 𝔊 because שָׂבָע is in his view used in 𝔐 as an object contrary to its normal adverbial usage, but in our text שָׂבָע can be understood both ways.

[51] Note the habitual use of the Px conjugations here; Yahweh's rebuking is not portrayed here as an isolated, one-off act, but as a continuous unfolding process.

[52] 𝔐 וְכְאָב; 𝔊 μαστιγοῖ δε, reading כאב as a verb, *and he whips the son he likes*. Toy (65) follows 𝔊 because of the similarities with Job 5:17-18, but while those two texts share some similar features, they are sufficiently distinct to invalidate the argument. Further, it is quite possible that 𝔊 adopted its reading because it found the reference to God as father irreverent. On the other hand, 𝔐 pointing could have been influenced by the following reference to son. The evidence is inconclusive.

paradigm God is firmly on the side of those who pursue wisdom, and it is, therefore, unlikely, if not entirely impossible, that those truly searching for wisdom would not find the truth; they may not know everything, but they are more or less right about that which they do know. It is here, at the heart of the sages' epistemology, that all the later problems that wisdom encounters, and to which Job and Qoheleth respond, start. Once experience is firmly linked with revelation, it begins to freeze in time, unable to cope with significant changes.

Overall, it is fair to say that the epistemology which the book represents is what could be called *epistemology of trust*. Its underlying assumption is that the truth is readily available out there and the paradigms and ways of reasoning represented by the book that stem from fervent search for it are true and need not be questioned. Indeed, it is the fools who question and reject the kind of wisdom that we find in Proverbs. The proverbial instruction is authoritative, it is to be heeded, rather than scrutinised and one is always looking for ways to explain new experience on the grounds of the paradigm rather than to reform the paradigm on the grounds of new experience.

The Epistemological Perspective of Qoheleth

Individual Observation and Collective Experience

One section of the book which throws a significant light on the role of observation in Qoheleth's epistemological perspective is the opening poem [Qoh 1:4-11]. Since the most important contribution of this material is to our understanding of Qoheleth's cosmology, its detailed treatment will be left for the following chapter. At this stage I will anticipate some of the conclusions that will be reached there focusing on the epistemological implications of the text. These are twofold. First, the poem shows that Qoheleth's world is coherent; the human and the natural are fully integrated with each other. It is, therefore, possible to study the larger phenomenal patterns, such as the movement of the sun, to humanity and to draw from them

conclusions about the nature of human existence. Thus, while we do not find in the book observations of creatures comparable to those found in Proverbs as discussed earlier,[53] this poem shows that Qoheleth's world has the same overall integrity as the world of the proverbial sages.

The second epistemological implication of the opening poem has to do with Qoheleth's claim that existence is cyclic, yet, constant. As a result of it, Qoheleth is convinced that his personal observations have an objective value, that they can be generalised and applied universally. The implicit belief in objectivity of such an experience surfaces in the frequent occurrences of command forms in the book; after all, the epilogue describes Qoheleth as a teacher [Qoh 12:9].

While in Proverbs direct observation is only occasionally presented as the source of knowledge, in Qoheleth the personal experience is the primary *modus operandi*, as is shown by the frequent appearances of the 1cs forms of ראה, ידע, or מצא.[54] However, this does not mean, as it is sometimes implied, that Qoheleth never builds on experience of others.[55] This can be shown in the following two examples. The first case in point is found in the already mentioned opening poem [Qoh 1:4-11]. Qoheleth assumes here that the natural phenomena he speaks about behave in an identical manner from one generation to another; the supposition is something that he cannot, quite obviously, verify by his own observation. Without stating it, he is relying on this being a universal human experience across the ages, taking it for granted without reservation. This particular assumption cannot be dismissed as trivial, as one may be tempted to do at first, for as we will see in the following chapter, Qoheleth's entire understanding of the world hinges on this premise.

The second example of Qoheleth using second-hand experience is found in the Solomonic experiment [Qoh 1:12-2:26]. In this section of the book Qoheleth takes

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[53] With the possible exception of Qoh 12:5Ab, but considering the obscurity of the imagery of Qoh 12:3-7, it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions from these verses.

[54] There are some 30 occurrences of these verbs in total.

[55] For instance Fox (1987:142) is of the view that Qoheleth never uses prior knowledge.

the experience of Solomon, identifies with it and draws his own conclusions from it.[56] This material shows that sometimes Qoheleth relies on another person's experience not purely out of necessity but by choice. There could be numerous reasons for Qoheleth using Solomon in this way, in particular, within the biblical tradition Solomon is the wise and successful man *par excellence*, and if anyone could possibly achieve anything substantial in life, it would be him. However, we are at present less interested in the reasons for this approach, and more in its epistemological significance. It shows, just as the former example does, that similarly to the proverbial sages, Qoheleth's epistemology is not purely individualistic. Yet, admittedly, Qoheleth does not draw on other people's knowledge very often and this fact leads us to the question of how Qoheleth assesses different experience and how he decides what to include and what to exclude when forming his paradigm.

Evaluating Experience

In spite of the aforementioned collective element to Qoheleth's epistemology, there is a significant divergence between Qoheleth and Proverbs, one that goes far beyond merely a difference in emphasis. In Proverbs the diachronic collective experience is treated synchronically and takes precedence over the immediate individual one; it is the knowledge accumulated by the subsequent generations of sages that represents the standard against which everything else is measured. In contrast, for Qoheleth his immediate experience is the norm by which any past

[56] There is little doubt that the king in Qoh 1:12 is to be identified as Solomon, especially in light of the king's exceeding wisdom [Qoh 1:16] and achievement [Qoh 2:4-11]. While it is true that the superscription [Qoh 1:1] extends this identification to the entire book, so that from the canonical perspective it is to be seen as a story about Solomon, I agree with the majority of scholars that within the core of the book, Qoheleth assumes Solomon's identity only temporarily. That Qoheleth cannot be identified with Solomon in real terms is clearly indicated by the linguistic evidence. The language of Qoheleth contains a large number of Aramaisms, two Persian words, and a number of grammatical peculiarities. On the overwhelming cumulative weight of the evidence, there is a general agreement that the book should be dated in the 3rd century BC. Attempts to establish a pre-exilic date (Fredericks 1988) or a later 2nd century date (Whitley 1979) have proven to be unconvincing.

experience is judged, and if the two contradict each other, it is the personal experience that is upheld. The following passage offers an excellent example:

> Since the sentence of[57] the evil deed is not carried out quickly, therefore the heart of human beings is full within them to do evil — because a sinner does evil a hundred[58] [times], yet, his [life] is prolonged[59] — although I know that it should[60] be well with the fearers of God, those[61] who keep fearing[62] before him, and it should[60] not be well with the wicked, and [his] days should[60] not be prolonged like[63] a shadow, because he did not fear before God. There is futility which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens as if they were wicked and there are wicked men, to whom it happens as if they were righteous. I said that also this is futile. [Qoh 8:11-14]

Here Qoheleth quite openly questions the perspective we have seen in Proverbs, namely, that the wicked suffer and the righteous prosper. He acknowledges that things should be like that, but is unable to reconcile his own experience with the common understanding.

However, it is important to understand the difference between the two perspectives, proverbial and Qoheleth's, is not primarily along the line of contrast between the collective and the individual. Instead, the principal distinction runs along a temporal line. The proverbial epistemology is inductive, working from a specific past experience toward a generalised understanding which is then applied to the present and the future. In contrast, Qoheleth's epistemology is deductive. He reduces his personal present experience to certain basic premises and works from these toward generalisation about both the past and the future.

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[57] Reading with 𝔊 and few manuscripts פִּתְגָם as a construct, *pace* the 𝔐 accents.

[58] 𝔐 מֵאַת; 𝔊 ἀπὸ τότε possibly reading מֵאָז; α', σ', θ' ἀπέθανεν, i.e., מֵת. The 𝔐 form is a construct which would seem to indicate a word (such as פָּנִים) has dropped out (Ogden 1987b:137), or, it could also be repointed to the feminine pl. מֵאֹת. Gordis (1955a:297) asserts that מאה always modifies a singular noun, but that is not the case, cf. מֵאָה פְּעָמִים in 2 Sam 24:3 (although, this phrase uses the absolute). Barton (1912:156) proposes to read מְאֹד, which could be accounted for by an audible error.

[59] 𝔐 וּמַאֲרִיךְ, 𝔊 ἀπο μακρότητος, i.e., מִן + אֹרֶךְ. While this fits reasonably well with the delayed execution of the sentence in the previous verse, it would be a mere restatement of what that verse already said, and so it is most likely the translator's attempt to make sense of the Hebrew. Gordis (1955a:298) understands מאריך as shortened for מאריך אף לו, but that is unlikely in the light of Qoh 8:12-13 which shows that the idiom is מַאֲרִיךְ יָמִים.

[60] Modal use of Px; the statements of the following verses preclude this to be interpreted as a simple future tense.

[61] Possibly, *because they fear him*, but that is a somewhat self-evident statement. It is therefore more likely that this clause is epexegetical, refining the phrase *fearers of God*.

[62] Habitual use of Px, parallel to the sinner committing evil a hundred times.

[63] 𝔐 כְּ; 𝔊 בְּ. The long shadow in the 𝔐 symbolises a late hour of a day, the 𝔊 text makes poor sense.

Place of Revelation

In the case of Proverbs, it has been observed that alongside the empirical modes of learning, there is a definite place for divine revelation, even though the mode of the revelation does not have rigidly defined contours. I wish to suggest that revelation also has its place in Qoheleth's quest for understanding. Consider the following passage:

> There is nothing better for man than[64] that he should[65] eat and drink, and make his soul to enjoy[66] his achievement. Yet,[67] this, I saw, that[68] it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can amass[69] apart from him?[70] For to the man who is pleasing to him he gives[71] wisdom and knowledge and joy, and to the sinner he gives affliction to gather and to amass to give it to one who is pleasing to God. Also this is futile and striving after wind. [Qoh 2:24-26]

Again, it is apparent that Qoheleth severed the link between wisdom and material success, since both the person who is pleasing to God and the sinner are in a similar position to start with; neither of them is lacking in material terms. In the case of the one who is pleasing to God, this is clearly implied by the fact that he has joy which in v. 24 is conceived in terms of eating and drinking. In the case of the sinner, this is made explicit, he is hoarding possessions. Therefore, the distinction between the two is not that one receives material success and the other does not. The difference is that one is endowed by God with wisdom, knowledge and joy and the other is not. It is

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[64] Reading with 𝔖, 𝔗. ם probably missing due to haplography with the ם of בָּאָדָם. What follows requires that the clause would have a positive sense and thus cannot be rendered *that it is not good* (*pace* Loader 1986:31).

[65] Modal use of Px, this sense is made even clearer in some manuscripts and 𝔖 reading לאכל.

[66] Lit. *to make his soul to see good.*

[67] גַּם means *yet* when linking clauses that are in a disjunctive relationship. While there is no explicit negative present here, it is, in my opinion, implied, for v. 24A states that the only thing one can get out of one's labour is the short-term satisfaction, while vv. 24B-26 assert that *not* all people can derive this type of satisfaction from their achievement, but only those favoured by God.

[68] כִּי introducing a content clause after a verb of perception.

[69] 𝔐 יָחוּשׁ; 𝔊, θ', 𝔖 read ישתה but the following verse, linked by כִּי, continues the thought and it is therefore most likely that יָחוּשׁ is antithetical to אכל (Gordis 1955a:216-17). 𝔊^{O}, α', σ' φείσεται, *to refrain* also seemed to have understood the two as antithetical. Fox (1989:188) renders *wonder, fret.* Ellermeier (1963:197-217) argued for the meaning *to worry* from comparative evidence, but I do not find the argument convincing. Ogden (1987b:48) makes an unsubstantiated claim that חוּשׁ means *to enjoy*. The best solution appears to be that of Seow (1997:139-40) who argues for the sense *to gather* based on the Arabic *ḥâša*, which is supported by the contrast between enjoyment and amassing of property in v. 26.

[70] 𝔐 מִמֶּנִּי; reading מִמֶּנּוּ with 𝔊 and 𝔖.

[71] Gnomic use of Sx.

the link between wisdom and joy as divine gifts that deserves further consideration in our attempt to understand Qoheleth's epistemology.[72] It can be observed that the link between the ability to enjoy and divine approval is not limited to the passage above. Consider for instance the following text:

> Go! Eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine in enjoyment of heart, for God already paid off your deeds. [Qoh 9:7][73]

All of the repeated calls for enjoyment culminate in Qoheleth's final advice:

> The light is sweet and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in all of them, but let him remember the dark days, for they could be many, all that comes is futile. Young man, rejoice in your youth, and let your heart make you happy in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and visions of your eyes, but know that concerning all of these God will bring you into judgement. [Qoh 11:7-9][74]

The reiterated claims that there is nothing better than to enjoy one's accomplishments point in the same direction, one explicitly stated in Qoh 2:24: true wisdom encompasses the sense to enjoy in the present that which can be enjoyed. However, Qoheleth believes that this sense is gained not by some rational deliberation, but is ultimately God-given; the sinner in Qoh 2:26 lacks this divine endowment and continues to hoard possessions which someone else will end up enjoying. Thus wisdom, in the fullest sense Qoheleth uses the word, can only be obtained through divine revelation. It would appear that the mode of the revelation we find here is quite similar to the divine insight that the proverbial sages believed to be receiving from God in their earnest pursuit of wisdom; it comes from divine benevolence outside of the confines of the formal boundaries of the cult.

At the same time Qoheleth also accepts that revelation takes place in the cult. It can be seen in the following advice to the reader:

> Watch your step when you go to the house of God, and approach more to obey than to offer a sacrifice, ... do not make your mouth to haste and do not let

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[72] The close link between joy and revelation in Qoheleth has been pointed out by Lohfink (1990), who, however, develops this relationship in a somewhat different direction.

[73] For textual notes see p. 202.

[74] For textual notes see p. 203.

> your heart hurry to utter a word before God … let your words be few. [Qoh 4:17 - 5:1][75]

Whether שׁמע in Qoh 4:17 should be rendered into English as *obey* or *listen* can be debated, but irrespective of the decision an interpreter may make in this matter, the surrounding text shows that Qoheleth has in mind communication between the worshipper and the deity. In this context listening is unlikely to refer to anything else but divine revelation. However, the reference to a *messenger* in Qoh 5:5 is most likely to a temple servant (or certainly a human official of some king), and suggests that the divine revelation in the cult is probably conceived as mediated; it is unlikely that Qoheleth here implies direct divine speech to an individual as a routine occurrence.

While the fact that Qoheleth believes that God plays an active role in the human search for understanding is something that he shares with the proverbial sages, the two perceptions of this divine involvement differ significantly:

> And I saw the occupation which God gave to sons of man to occupy/afflict[76] [themselves] with. He makes everything beautifully[77] in its[78] time; also, he put ignorance[79] in their hearts, because of which[80] man is not able to find[81] the

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[75] For textual notes see p. 116.

[76] The meaning of the verb ענה is ambiguous here; I am inclined to think that this ambiguity is intentional (see also note 89 on p. 161 with reference to Qoh 1:13).

[77] This is the sense of יָפֶה in BH. The meaning of יָפֶה in later Hebrew is *good*, *appropriate* (see JAS and the discussion in Barton 1908:105). A key question is whether it is an adjectival modifier of הַכֹּל or adverbial modifier of עשׂה. I am inclined to think that the word order points toward the latter. In any case, this refers to the equilibrium of things stated in the preceding poem.

[78] The main concern of this section of material is with the time of things. This suggests that the time rather than God is the referent of the 3ms sfx.

[79] Reading הָעֵלֶם, *ignorance* as first suggested by Joseph Karo (see Perry 1993:185). This makes best sense in the context and the defective spelling serves here as a clue (the only other time עוֹלָם is spelled defectively in Qoheleth is the plural form in Qoh 1:10, cf. the full spelling Qoh 3:14). The verbal root עלם with the sense *to conceal* appears in Qoh 12:14 (Crenshaw 1988:99). The use of *nota accusativi* with non-determined noun is found elsewhere in the book (e.g. Qoh 3:15; 7:7). Gordis (1955a:221-22) prefers to read עוֹלָם as *world*, but this sense is not attested in BH, and has no special merit in our passage. Ogden (1987b:55) accepts 𝔐 arguing that the temporal expression fits the context, offering a new dimension alongside of עֵת and זְמָן, but considering that this reality is not external, but rather internal to humanity it is hard to understand it as a 'dimension' of the world, which is what the preceding temporal references have in mind. Even if one wishes to read *eternity* with 𝔐 and the versions, or *world* with Gordis, the meaning of the whole verse is not significantly impacted — whatever God put into the human mind, it prevents humanity from intellectually catching up with him (see note 80 below). Fox (1989:194) emends to עמל but there is no textual evidence or need for such emendation, and the emended sentence is awkward.

> deeds which God does — from the beginning to the end. I came to know that there is nothing better for them[82] but to rejoice and to do well in one's life.[83] But also every man who can eat and drink[84] and enjoy[85] the fruit-of-his-labour — it is a gift of God. I came to know that whatever God may do, will be forever[86] — it is impossible[87] to add to it and it is impossible to subtract from it. And God does this so that they would fear[88] him. [Qoh 3:10-14]

This passage is in some respects similar to Qoh 2:24-26 considered earlier; here we meet again the statement that there is nothing better than to enjoy life, with the enjoyment conditioned by divine approval. However, this passage offers a greater insight into nature of the human search for wisdom. In Proverbs, Yahweh is the ultimate patron of the wisdom quest and Dame Wisdom, acting on God's behalf, is keen to share understanding of the world's deepest secrets with those wishing to learn on her terms. However, in the passage above Qoheleth paints God in an entirely different light; Qoheleth's God is much more reserved in disclosing any secrets to humanity. In fact, he has intentionally limited human ability to understand the world

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[80] מִבְּלִי can be used as a substantive meaning *nothing* (only once in the OT in Job 18:15), a preposition or a conjunction. As a preposition מִבְּלִי means *without*, a use also attested in MH. As a conjunction, it normally introduces a nominal clause and means *because of no ...*, e.g. Exod 14:11 (BDB suggests *so that there is no...*, but this rendering is misleading as in English this construction can be both final and consecutive, while this use is never final in the OT, but rather causal-epexegetical - see Jer 2:15; 9:9-11; Ezek 14:15; Zeph 3:6; Job 6:6). Only once is it followed by a finite verb (Deut 28:55) with the same meaning. The nominal use is clearly ruled out for Qoh 3:11 and the prepositional sense *without* does not suit the context because the main clause is concerned with presence, not absence. Thus מִבְּלִי must function in Qoh 3:11 as a conjunction, and as the OT use is uniform, it needs to be rendered as causal. It fits the standard construction when it is followed by a nominal expression, here the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר, i.e., *because of which*. The negative לֹא is pleonastic (for another case of pleonastic negative with מִבְּלִי see מִבְּלִי אֵין Exod 14:11; 2 Kgs 1:3, 6, 16). The common renderings *yet, so that* (KBL[2]) and *so that not* (BDB) are unjustified in the light of the evidence.

[81] Modal use of Px.

[82] 𝔐 בָּם. Gordis (1955a:222) considers בָּם a dittography from טוֹב כִּי (כ and ם being very similar in the script from the Maccabean period), but 𝔐 is supported by both 𝔊 and 𝔖 and makes a reasonably good sense.

[83] The idiom לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹב, *to do well*, has its parallel in Greek (Crenshaw 1988:98-99), but also in many other languages. A corresponding idiom *to do badly* is found in 2 Sam 12:18, suggesting that this is not necessarily a Graecism (Barton 1908:106).

[84] Modal use of Px and wav relative + Sx.

[85] Lit. *seeing good in*.

[86] Fox (1989:194-95) claims that this is not in the sense of lasting, but rather *it will always happen*. Yet, Qoheleth does not think in the poem of individual and isolated actions, but rather in terms of the broader phenomenal framework within which everything happens, and this framework is fixed and unchangeable, i.e., eternal (see the discussion of the poem on p. 126).

[87] The construction אֵין לְ gains this sense in later Hebrew.

[88] Ogden's (1987b:57) proposal to read ראה instead of ירא is unconvincing. The appearance of ראה in v. 10 has little bearing on the decision and the resulting use of מִלְּפָנָיו with ראה is awkward, while Qoheleth uses the preposition with ירא elsewhere [Qoh 8:12].

and the ways in which he operates, and uses this limitation as the means for keeping humanity in proper relationship with him. Thus, while in Proverbs ignorance was a sign of rejection of the divinely sanctioned search to understand the world, for Qoheleth ignorance is ultimately something that God desires, for he ensures through it that human beings will not succeed in disrupting the overall equilibrium he imposed on the world, the equilibrium at the heart of Qoheleth's paradigm.

The assertions found in the two passages quoted above seemingly present radically different perspectives. The former shows that Qoheleth accepts that divine revelation is channelled through the cult and further that he even considers such revelation as authoritative, yet, in the latter text Qoheleth is adamant that God severely limited the human ability to understand him and what he is up to. However, these two assertions are not mutually exclusive, since they refer to a different type of knowing (one which flows downwards from God to humans, and the other upwards from humans to God); Qoheleth's God can be only understood from what he himself chooses to reveal about himself.

The divine involvement in the process of knowing has two cascading ramifications for the wisdom enterprise. First, somewhat obviously, the sage cannot claim that he knows what God is up to, if he does, he is a liar [Qoh 8:17]. This stands in contrast to the proverbial view, for the proverbial sage believes that he more or less knows what God is doing. Second, a necessary implication of the first, the value of wisdom is diminished. There is a limit to what wisdom can achieve and, therefore, there must be a limit to which one pursues wisdom. When wisdom is sought after excessively, the outcome will not justify the investment. While this does not mean that wisdom does not have value and is not worth pursuing in principle, it does stand in stark contrast to the emphatic admonitions of Proverbs to acquire wisdom at all costs.

Further, it is not only that Qoheleth considers unrestrained search for understanding to be a loss-making business, but there seems to be some indication that he may even consider it harmful:

> 'Look! This is what I found,' said Qoheleth, [adding] one to one to get [the] result. 'My soul sought again — and [again] I did not find: one man out of a thousand I found, but a woman among all of these I did not find. Only, look at what I found, that God made mankind straight, but they sought many solutions.' [Qoh 7:27-29][89]

While it is somewhat obscure precisely what kind of men and women Qoheleth was looking for, the failure to find them is quite clearly perceived as undesirable, and it appears that Qoheleth blames it on human intellectual endeavour. If חֶשְׁבּוֹן in v. 29 is understood in the light of v. 27 (see discussion on p. 165) then the whole verse refers to a search for solutions to difficult, if not insoluble problems, to the perpetual human desire to understand, and thus control, the surrounding world. Such endeavour in Qoheleth's view can only lead to frustration and loss of intellectual clarity.[90]

One final issue needs to be considered — whether there is any discernible difference in the epistemological perspective of the core of Qoheleth and of the editorial frame, specifically of the epilogue. I am inclined to agree with Sheppard's (1977) analysis, that the ideas contained in the epilogue can all be traced to the core of the book. Yet, while the epilogist builds on Qoheleth's own claims, he treats them selectively, placing emphasis on certain notions:

> The words of the wise are like spikes and like nails[91] set in place [by] collectors,[92] given from one shepherd. Above these,[93] my son, be warned: there

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[89] For textual notes see p. 165, where the whole passage Qoh 7:23-29 is discussed in a greater detail.

[90] It is worth noting that the theme of the corrupting impact of wisdom and knowledge is not unique to Qoheleth. The simplicity of life in the garden of Eden is ruined by the human desire to know more than God intended in Gen 2-3, and again, wisdom is at the heart of shattering of the initial idyllic state of affairs in the garden of Eden in Ezek 28:11-19.

[91] While 𝔐 מַשְׂמְרוֹת forms a good parallel with דְּרְבֹנוֹת, it is also plausible to read MH מְשֻׁמָּרוֹת, *barrier*s, fitting well with the shepherd imagery.

[92] Assuming haplography and reading מִבַּעֲלֵי, cf. 𝔊 οἱ παρὰ τῶν συναγμάτων. Another possibility is that בְּ, used alongside לְ to express an agent of a passive Niphal (WOC 23.2.2f), could be assimilated in בַּעֲלֵי, cf. comparable phenomenon attested in the OT in case of בֵּית. Driver (1954:234-35) is of the view that 𝔐 division of the verse is incorrect, and בַּעֲלֵי אֲסִפּוֹת starts the next line, i.e., it is the collectors rather than the sayings that are given by one shepherd. He further understands the phrase as

Continued on the following page

> is no end to producing many books, and much reading[94] tires the body. End of [the] matter, [of] everything heard, fear God and keep his commandments, for this perfects[95] a human being. [Qoh 12:11-13]

The epilogist seized the logical implications of Qoheleth's epistemology for the value of wisdom, taking them much further than Qoheleth was prepared to do. He asserts plainly that the upward search for knowledge is endless and produces very little and, therefore, one has to order one's life according to the downward stream of wisdom, the revealed divine command. Significantly, the epilogist's concept of divine revelation is more clearly defined than either that of Proverbs or the Qoheleth proper. Verse 11 seems to have in mind the vague and indirect revelation that both books seems to consider, where the sages in their search for understanding receive illumination from God. However, the following reference to God's commandments indicates that alongside it the writer has in mind a more clearly defined revelation, which involves direct divine speech. This is something that traditionally belongs to the sphere of the cult rather than wisdom and the epilogist appears not only to be concerned that these two modes of revelation should not be separated from each other, but quite clearly perceives the cultic revelation as taking precedence over the wisdom quest.

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referring to gathering people. However, the principal subject of vv. 11-12 is quite clearly *words of the wise* and their usefulness, and this makes 𝔐 division of the line preferable to Driver's. Wilson's (1984:176) suggestion that בַּעֲלֵי is a reference to the collected material has to be rejected since בַּעַל is always personal.

[93] Fox (1989:326-7) wishes to set the pause between וְיֹתֵר and מֵהֵמָּה (*pace* 𝔐), but this produces awkward word order in the resulting clause.

[94] Reading infc. of הגה with the final ת lost due to haplography (see Qoheleth Rabbah 12:12); 𝔊 μελέτη, *care, attention, anxiety*.

[95] The meaning of כָּל־הָאָדָם is uncertain and the versions appear to struggle with the same text. Gordis (1955a:355) gives examples of construction of the type אֲנִי תְפִלָּה in support of rendering *this is the whole duty of man*, but it should be noted that all of these are in poetry, while our passage is prosaic. Fox (1989:329) pointed out that כָּל־הָאָדָם normally means either *every man* or *all men*, but never *the whole man*; elsewhere in Qoheleth this construction is used only in the former sense [Qoh 3:13; 5:18; 7:2]. A number of very attractive options open when the possibility of כָּל being a verb is considered: (a) כול, *for this a human being comprehends*; (b) כלא (loss of א via scribal error due to the proximity of הָאָדָם) *for this restrains a human being*; (c) כלה (loss of ה due to haplography) *for this is the end of a human being*; (d) כלל *this perfects a human being*. All of these fit either the epilogist's attitude toward striving for wisdom and progress (a) or the immediate context of judgement (b-c) or both (d).

The seemingly positive reference to the wise men and their work should not obscure from us what is really happening in the epilogue; the endlessness of the wisdom quest is purely rhetorical, for from the epilogist's point of view it does not reside in the fact that the complete knowledge cannot be obtained by humans, as it did for Qoheleth, but rather that all that is to be known is already known and written down; the endlessness of any further search resides in the fact that such a search is carried out in a vacuum of new facts. This represents a significant epistemological shift from both Proverbs and Qoheleth, for it essentially implies that the principal source of human knowledge is not found in experience and the ability to evaluate it and learn from it, but rather that it is located in the cult. In other words, the epilogist does not stand in the same tradition of thought from which both Proverbs and Qoheleth stem; he is not a sage, but a theologian.[96]

Summary

To summarise the examination of the epistemological perspectives of the two books, there are some similarities and some differences. For the two main voices of these books, observation and experience are the decisive sources of knowledge and in both cases human experience is perceived as objective,[97] thus allowing for generalisation as well as co-operation in the quest for understanding of the world and the human place in it. In other words, the epistemology of both books is primarily empirical, and we can, therefore, further narrow the definition of their quest to *the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator, and self-realisation in the context of these relationships, based on a primarily empirical epistemology and a paradigmatic approach to understanding.*

However, the two epistemologies are not identical. In Proverbs the cumulative collective experience is the standard against which every new experience

[96] *Pace* Fox (1977).
[97] Similar conclusions about the perception of wisdom as objective were reached by Fox (1987:151).

is measured and by which, if necessary, it is overruled. Qoheleth's attitude toward secondary information is much more critical, for him the immediate personal experience is the criterion, and only secondary experience which conforms to this measure is considered any further. This principal difference impacts the nature of the two books. Qoheleth is much more contemplative than Proverbs, and his reader is let into 'the workshop'; the rules are made here and now and the conclusions stem from an argument that the reader is invited to examine. In contrast, in the proverbial world the rules are already there, they are inherited, passed on from one generation to the next.

While quite clearly both epistemologies are principally empirical, in both Proverbs and Qoheleth the success with which one may penetrate the inner workings of the world is not entirely up to human capabilities; it is only at the will of God that the sage is able to understand. The main distinction between the two books in this respect is in the extent to which God is prepared to grant such an understanding to those who seek it. In Proverbs, there seem to be few limits to what the sage can achieve, for the search for wisdom is divinely sanctioned, indeed it is a divine demand. In contrast, Qoheleth's God is prepared to provide only limited insight to humanity in order to preserve his superior position, and this leads to depreciation of the entire wisdom quest. The limits of wisdom and its value are in this respect taken a step further by the epilogist who advocates a dependency and subjection of the wisdom quest to a direct, cultic, revelation.

While the epistemological differences between the two primary voices cannot be marginalised, it can be observed that the principal difference lies in *how much* a sage can understand the world. When perceived this way, it is not necessary to see the two perspectives as entirely rival and antagonistic.[98] Further, we have to appreciate that the two epistemologies reflect to at least some extent the distinct working confines of the books, which have been pointed out in the previous chapter,

[98] Cf. Fox's (1987:154) understanding that Qoheleth does not attack traditional wisdom, but rather appropriates and extends it.

namely the explicit focus of Proverbs on the beginner in the field of wisdom. From the point of view of the immature youth, the difference that knowledge can make is enormous, and can be easily perceived as, and therefore also presented as, endless. On the other hand, when Qoheleth assesses the relative value of wisdom, he is not taking as his reference point the possibilities that learning opens to the immature, but rather how much the sage is unable to achieve in spite of his learning.

However, while the different working confines of the two books clearly influence their perspective, it has to be acknowledged that the epistemological differences cannot be reconciled entirely on these grounds, just as I have pointed out in the preceding chapter that the principal difference in the two paradigms cannot be explained satisfactorily along these lines. The proverbial world is genuinely open to examination while Qoheleth's world is not, and we will have to look for other possible reasons that might offer an adequate explanation of this epistemological shift.

Finally, it was observed that the epistemological perspective presented in the epilogue of Qoheleth differs radically from both Proverbs and Qoheleth proper. The epilogist is a theologian rather than a sage, who in fact believes not only that human ability to know is limited, but that it has ultimately reached its limits; any genuine insight from now on must originate in a cultic context. Thus, while, from the epistemological point of view, Proverbs and Qoheleth proper can be seen as a record of internal debate and evolving of the wisdom quest, two entirely different worlds meet at the boundary between Qoheleth proper and the epilogue of the book.[99]

[99] This conclusion raises certain questions of historical nature, which will be touched upon in the Excursus.

Chapter 3

THE SAGES, GOD AND THE WORLD

In the previous chapter I touched several times on issues pertaining to the cosmology and theology of the two books. In this chapter I am going to focus on these two aspects of the sages' worldview. It must be pointed out from the very beginning that the theological and cosmological elements in Proverbs and Qoheleth are difficult to separate from each other, and doing so would prevent us from understanding the very nature of the world as the sages perceived it. The affinity of these two aspects of the worldview has been perceived by others. Thus, Boström (1990:83) writes:

> ... the world theme is employed to enhance the status of wisdom by portraying is [sic] as closely associated with the Lord as an instrument in, or a unique witness of, his creation. In this fashion the creation motif itself turns out to be secondary, though at the same time it conveys a number of ideas and views of creation which were part of the theology cherished within the wisdom traditions.

Indeed, God is a critical ingredient of the world the sages saw themselves as a part of, for their world is ultimately God's world. He is inseparable from the world through which he is known, and consequently neither can the cosmos be separated from, and therefore understood apart from, him. Any statements the sages make about the world are necessarily also statements about God; their cosmological deliberation has immediate theological implications. Yet, no attempt is made to examine or discuss God apart from the cosmos; the theological perspective of these books runs purely on the level of the interaction between God and the cosmos. We find here no ontological statements about God, nor direct and abstract statements

about the divine character; God is always a factor in, and yet, never the true subject of, the sages' deliberation. Thus, it is apparent that theology is not what the sages were primarily interested in; their approach to theological issues is from a perspective which we would nowadays call interdisciplinary. Therefore, in contrast to Boström, I wish to suggest that in the relationship between cosmology and theology the theological perspective is secondary and depended on the cosmological perspective. In the rest of this chapter I am going to look into the sages' understanding of the world they lived in, the key principles they perceived to have operated within it and the role played by God in it.

The Makeup of the Proverbial Cosmos

The Divine Sphere and Its God

The world of the proverbial sages, in line with the widespread ANE view, is tripartite: it is made up of a divine sphere, a sphere that belongs to the living and a sphere that belongs to the dead. I will start with the examination of the first, the divine domain. The sages show only very limited interest in the divine segment of the cosmos. The main reason for this lies in the fact that in the proverbial view this sphere is not at all accessible to humans:

> Words of Agur, son of Jake, the Massaite.[1] Statement of the man: 'I am weary O God, I am weary, O God, and consumed,[2] for indeed[3] I am more stupid than

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[1] 𝔐 דִּבְרֵי אָגוּר בֶּן־יָקֵה הַמַּשָּׂא, I agree with McKane (1970:644) that הַמַּשָּׂא should be emended to הַמַּשָּׂאִי. 𝔊 τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους, υἱέ, φοβήθητι καὶ δεξάμενος αὐτοὺς μετανόει, possibly reading דִּבְרֵי גוּר בְּנִי וְקָחֵם (?)מְשַׁנֵּה. 𝔗 translates *the words of the assembler, the son of the vomiter* (Toy 518); quite clearly the text presented difficulties from early on.

[2] 𝔐 לְאִיתִיאֵל לְאִיתִיאֵל וְאֻכָל cannot be correct on syntactical grounds (see note 3) and the repetition of a personal name is inappropriate if the whole v. 1 is a superscription. I am therefore reading לאיתי אל לאיתי אל ואכל (see also Franklyn 1983:242-44). 𝔊 rendering of ואכל by παύομαι does not necessarily imply that it read active ptc (*pace* BHS). An attractive emendation was proposed by Krantz (1996), suggesting to read לֹא אִתּוֹ אֵל לְאִיתִי אֵל וָאֻכֶל, and rendering a whole line *the word of a man not supported by God: 'I am weary, O God, and exhausted.'* Torrey's (1954) suggestion, that original text read לֹא אָנֹכִי אֵל לֹא אֲנִי אֵל וְאוּכַל, which was offensive to some later editor who translated it to Aramaic לְאִיתַי אֵל לְאִיתַי אֵל וְאֵכַל and then revocalised it to obscure the sense, is far fetched and the emendation does not have any particular merit. Equally his objection that אֵל cannot be a vocative which would have to be הָאֵל is not fully justified in light of Num 12:13; Ps 10:11; 83:2

Continued on the following page

> [any other] man, and do not have human understanding. And I did not learn wisdom[4] and cannot[5] have divine knowledge.[6] Who went up to the heavens and came down? Who gathered wind in his hands?[7] Who restricted waters in a mantle? Who established all the ends of the earth? What is his name? What is the name of his son? Surely you know! Every word of God is refined, he is a shield to those who seek refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebukes you and you are shown to be a liar.' [Prov 30:1-6]

A sarcastic tone is quite clearly detectable in this passage, culminating in v. 4. This ironical statement is an acknowledgement that the divine and human worlds do not overlap and human beings are incapable of entering heaven. Agur's intention is to place wisdom within proper boundaries; there are limits to what it can achieve. While this is the only place in Proverbs where the inaccessibility of the divine sphere is explicitly asserted, the striking lack of interest in it throughout the book, and the need for a mediator between humans and the deity discussed earlier, suggest that this view is not limited to Agur, but was widespread among the proverbial sages; proverbial wisdom is an earthly exercise with earthly concerns, it has no mystical elements.

In spite of the sages' lack of interest some information about the divine domain can be gathered from the speech of Dame Wisdom in Prov 8:22ff:

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as pointed out by Franklyn, who also notes the striking similarities with Jer 20:9. Assuming literary dependency, he derives ואכל from כלה understanding it as a reference to Agur's dying.

[3] It has been suggested that כִּי is emphatic here (Schoors 1981:245), but the particle is never purely emphatic always preserving some of its logical value just as the English emphatic *surely* or *indeed* do (the emphatic use can be thought of as a special case where an explicit idea that follows is linked to an implied context). Thus 𝔐 vocalisation of v. 1 is almost certainly incorrect, for כִּי starting the whole discourse is implausible.

[4] 𝔐 וְלֹא־לָמַדְתִּי; 𝔊 θεὸς δεδίδαχέν με, i.e., אל למד אתי. While some support for 𝔊 could be found in the absence of the negative in the B colon, the larger context speaks strongly in favour of 𝔐.

[5] Modal use of Px; the negative is carried over from the A colon.

[6] 𝔐 דַּעַת קְדֹשִׁים, 𝔊 γνῶσιν ἁγίων; lit. *knowledge of holy ones*. Toy (521) renders קְדֹשִׁים as *Holy One*, referring to Prov 9:10, which is almost certainly how the phrase would have been understood when the 𝔐 text was finalised, but the expression has unmistakable polytheistic overtones. The genitive function can be understood in three ways, either as objective, i.e., knowledge about gods, subjective, i.e., knowledge that gods possess, or attributive, i.e., sacred cultic knowledge. The modal sense of the verb, which indicates impossibility, and the general thrust of the passage suggest the subjective genitive as the most likely option. Agur speaks of a progressively better type of knowledge, from natural intelligence, via the learned חָכְמָה, to the final דַּעַת קְדֹשִׁים, and claims to possess none.

[7] 𝔐 בְּחָפְנָיו; 𝔊 ἐν κόλπῳ, i.e., בְּחֹצְנוֹ, but the imagery of gathering speaks in favour of 𝔐. Cathcart (1970) proposes rendering *in his garments* on the basis of Ugaritic, which does make a good parallel to the following בְּשִׂמְלָה.

Yahweh brought me into being,[8] [9]the beginning of his way,[10] before his deeds of old.[11] From eternity[12] I was formed,[13] from[14] the beginning, prior to the earth's existence. When there were no primeval oceans, I was born,[15] when there were no springs rich in water.[16] Before the mountains were settled, prior to the hills I was born. While there was still no earth and open space,[17] and ahead[18] of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens,[19] I was there, when he engraved[20] the horizon upon the surface of the primeval ocean,[21] when he made the sky[22] above firm, when he overpowered[23] the springs of the primeval ocean, when he set for the sea its limit (so that water

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[8] The question whether קנה should be translated here *to acquire*, *to create* or *to beget* has not been satisfactorily resolved. In a detailed study Burney (1926) presents a convincing case that קנה has the primary sense *to acquire by buying/creating/begetting*. He argues for the sense *to beget* in our passage, on the grounds that חלל and נְסַכְתִּי (see below p. 91*n*13) imply the context of birth. In contrast, Fox (1997:163) prefers *acquired, by creating* and similarly Delitzsch (184) argues for *created*, asserting, however, that קנה, contrary to ברא, does not imply the beginning of existence, and thus does not imply that Wisdom here is not eternal (little is offered to substantiate the argument). Irwin (1961) then denies the sense of creating in favour of begetting altogether, while Vawter (1980) repudiates any other meaning than *to acquire* (but his arguments concerning the use in Gen 4:1 and Ps 139:13 are not fully convincing). McKane (1970:352) objects to rendering *acquired*, pointing out that within the context of Prov 8 we expect some statement about the origins of Wisdom, with which view I am inclined to agree. Considering that קנה can be applied to origins of both humans and material objects, it is questionable whether significant distinction between *create/beget* is inherent to the verb, and, therefore, I have chosen a more neutral rendering.

[9] 𝔐 has no preposition, 𝔖, 𝔗, and some 𝔙 manuscripts read בְּ, probably under the influence of Gen 1:1. The choice is not negligible, for in 𝔐 Wisdom is not simply the first of the created things, but the very starting point of God's activity, she stands apart from that which is later created (cf. Delitzsch 184).

[10] 𝔊 has pl., probably a stylistic variation. Dahood's (1968a) Ugaritic-based proposal to read 𝔐 דַּרְכּוֹ as a verb meaning *to control* is not convincing, nor is his suggestion to render the following קֶדֶם as a divine name.

[11] 𝔐 מֵאָז not reflected in 𝔊 and 𝔖.

[12] Dahood's (1968a) suggestion that עוֹלָם and the following קֶדֶם are references to deities is hardly correct, since the focus of the text is temporal at this point, as vv. 24-29 show.

[13] 𝔐 נְסַכְתִּי, i.e., Niphal of נסך, *I was consecrated*. I follow Burney (1926:165-66) and read Niphal סכך, *to interweave*, which can be applied to an embryo — see Job 10:11 and especially Ps 139:13. BHS proposes נוֹסַדְתִּי, but Burney's solution is in my view preferable.

[14] 𝔐 מִן, 𝔊 reads בְּ which reflects the use of the preposition by the version in v. 22 (see note 9).

[15] For this sense of חלל see Job 15:7.

[16] 𝔐 מַעְיָנוֹת נִכְבַּדֵי־מָיִם Albright (1955) argues for emendation of נִכְבַּדֵי to נבכי on the basis of Ugaritic. However, the root is not attested in Hebrew, and the Ugaritic meaning *source* does not fit the context, being semantically redundant and syntactically awkward.

[17] 𝔖, 𝔗, 𝔙 read *rivers*. Thomas (1965) suggests that there could have been, based on Arabic, a Hebrew root חוץ referring to water, but the evidence is not sufficient. Further, the discussion has moved in vv. 25-26 from water to dry land.

[18] McKane (1970:355) following KBL^2 *mass of the earth's soil*, but the parallelism with 26A and the surrounding context favour temporal understanding.

[19] Lit. *in his establishing of*, similarly in 27B-29.

[20] So 𝔐 בְּחוּקוֹ; however, an emendation to בְּחֻזְקוֹ, as proposed by KBL^2, is attractive.

[21] 𝔊 καὶ ὅτε ἀφώριζεν τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θρόνον ἐπ' ἀνέμων, *and when he set apart his throne upon winds*. Again, this is most likely an improvisation by the translator.

[22] The Hebrew שְׁחָקִים is frequently rendered *clouds*, but the OT usage indicates that it is more akin to שָׁמַיִם than to עָבִים (see for instance Ps 18:2; 89:38). The reference here is to a solid layer that separates the waters above and below, also called רָקִיעַ (see in particular Job 37:18).

[23] See Dan 11:12 for this use of עזז.

> would not cross its edge[24]), when he hollowed out[25] the foundations of the earth. And I was growing up[26] by his side and I was [his] delight day by day,[27] laughing before him all the time. Laughing in the world, his earth, and my delight was humanity.[28] [Pr 8:22-31]

This passage shows that the divine sphere has an existence which is entirely independent of the human world, for God is active before the human world is brought into being by his creative work. The above account of divine activity starts with Yahweh bringing into being the enigmatic figure of Wisdom. The birth of Wisdom is then followed by the creative activity proper out of which the human world emerges.

However, there is an informational vacuum between these two phases, one which in my opinion offers a significant insight into the nature of the divine domain. In between Yahweh bringing forth Wisdom and creating the world, the forces of chaos, תְּהוֹם, quietly and without explanation enter the scene. The sudden appearance of תְּהוֹם creates a certain tension in the text. On the one hand Wisdom, and therefore also Yahweh, are clearly pre-existent to תְּהוֹם, but on the other hand,

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[24] This rendering of פִּיו is preferable to *his command* (e.g. Toy 173) in the light of the preceding חֻקּוֹ.

[25] 𝔐 בְּחוּקוֹ; 𝔊 בְּחַזְקוֹ, but this is possibly a guess, for the translator quite clearly was not familiar with the verb חקק as is indicated by the generic rendering by ἑτοιμάζειν, *to prepare*, in v. 27.

[26] The versions understood 𝔐 אמן as a verb: 𝔊 ἁρμόζουσα, *preparing, fitting together, setting in order*, α' τιθηνουμενη, *nursing, maintaining*, 𝔖 ܐܬܬܩܢ ܥܡܗ, *I was working with him*. Delitzsch (190-2) renders *director of works* (cf. Can 7:2). He argues that אמן with reference to children denotes the notion of fostering, which is quite inappropriate in the context, for Wisdom is God's real child, if anything, and asserts that the activities in which Wisdom is involved in this chapter hardly fit child-like imagery. However, it should be observed that Wisdom is merely present, but otherwise uninvolved up to v. 30 and, as Scott (1960) observed, nothing is said of Wisdom's creative activity. Yet, somewhat self-contradictory, Scott advocates rendering along the lines of *binding, uniting, fashioning* which in his view allows for Wisdom's participation in creation without requiring hypostatic interpretation. However, Scott's methodology used to eliminate other possibilities cannot be applied to an unpointed text, and must, therefore, be rejected. Rogers (1997) defends the meaning *master workman* but argues that it has Yahweh, not Wisdom as the referent, based on the gender of the noun (see also Dahood 1968a). However, the masculine gender in BH is unmarked and the entire verse is concerned with Wisdom's activity. Fox (1996a), following Qimhi, pointed out that the infa. of אמן can be used in the sense of growing up, being raised (e.g. Esth 2:20), and such understanding makes good sense in the context, where the previous verses speak of the birth of Wisdom. I am, therefore, inclined to read infa. along these lines.

[27] Cf. 𝔊 ἐγὼ ἤμην ᾗ προσέχαιρεν, *I was in whom he rejoiced*, which in my view is the correct understanding of the Hebrew, Wisdom is Yahweh's delight here, cf. v. 31B.

[28] Dahood (1968a) wishes to read אֵת בֹּנֵה אָדֹם, *with the Builder of Earth*, based on the Ugaritic use of ptc *bnh* as an epithet for El. However, 𝔐 flows very naturally from Wisdom in the presence of God, to Wisdom in the world, to Wisdom with humanity, thus preparing the ground for the admonition of the next stanza, and should be retained.

nothing is said of Yahweh creating it, on the contrary, the creative activity is about defeating it.[29] Is Yahweh responsible for it, or if not, does it mean that he is not fully in charge of the divine domain? This tension in the text is in my view not an oversight on the part of the authors, but is conditioned by the nature of the proverbial paradigm. In the proverbial understanding there is not, i.e., cannot be, any connection between the God and the forces of chaos, and further, the former is always affirmed to be qualitatively superior to the latter. On the theological level, it means that while God cannot be seen as responsible for the emergence of chaos, he cannot be portrayed as not being in full control either, or as having an existence on a par with the forces of chaos. Allowing תְּהוֹם to emerge quietly onto the world stage is the sages' way of circumventing the implications of the puzzling question of its origins.[30]

We can see that the sages were building on a common ANE myth about the battle between the forces of order and chaos, yet, diverging from it significantly in their understanding of the divine, avoiding any overt polytheism.[31] While there are two occurrences where the word קְדֹשִׁים, with its clear polytheistic connotations, is used with reference to the divine [Prov 9:10; 30:3], the book almost exclusively uses the personal name יהוה when talking about God. Only exceptionally is אֱלֹהִים employed, but with respect to this word it can be observed, that the choice is mainly poetic and on only one occasion does it appears entirely arbitrary.[32]

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[29] I will return to the nature of the creative activity later in this chapter, when dealing with the human sphere.

[30] The weightiness of the reasons for disassociating Yahweh from the origins of the forces of chaos and maintaining his qualitative superiority will become clear in due course. This manner of dealing with the problem is not unique to Prov 8:22ff. Very much the same approach can be found in Gen 2-3, for instance, where on one hand God declares the whole of creation as good, and on the other hand the shrewd snake, that does not fit that evaluation, emerges without an explanation.

[31] See also the discussion of the identity of the personified Wisdom below.

[32] The personal name יהוה is used on 87 occasions in the book, while אֱלֹהִים is found only in Prov 2:5, 17; 3:4; 25:2; 30:9. On two of these occasions [Prov 2:5; 30:9] the word is used as a B colon parallel to יהוה. The same is most likely the case in Prov 3:4 with the parallel in 3:5. In Prov 2:17 the term is used with respect to אִשָּׁה זָרָה, and so it is possible that foreign gods are referred to. Only in Prov 25:2 no special reasons for the choice of אֱלֹהִים as the designation for God are apparent.

The systematic use of the personal name יהוה indicates a clear effort at some stage in the development of the tradition to identify emphatically with the Yahwistic religion. However, we should not immediately conclude from this that the religious outlook that hides in the background is identical to that found elsewhere in the Yahwistic tradition of the OT. Instead, we have to ask the question '*who is Yahweh in Proverbs?*' resisting any temptation to introduce into the exposition of the book theological concepts found elsewhere in the OT, notably in the prophetic and legal traditions; the fact that Proverbs shows little contact with, and in fact interest in, these traditions demands that we look for the answer to this question in the book itself.

The use of the tetragrammaton in the book has one peculiar feature: it appears even in those sections of the material that are of foreign provenance. These include Prov 22:17ff.,[33] 30:1ff.,[34] 31:1-9 and possibly also 30:10ff., if the entire chapter is understood as words of Lemuel's mother. It is not particularly important whether the exo-Israelite origins are so in real terms or purely on a literary level. In either case, the personal name יהוה was at some point applied to God in material which was known, or perceived, as to have originated in a non-Yahwistic milieu.[35] It follows from this that in the proverbial perspective the personal name יהוה is not defining, only descriptive. The use of יהוה here denotes not so much that Yahweh, the God revealed in the Israelite cult, is the sages' God, but rather that the sages' God, witnessed in the world, is Yahweh, who also revealed himself in the cult. It shows

[33] This section of the book is based on Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemopet*, although it must be acknowledged that the relationship between the two texts is not entirely simple. On one hand there is a significant amount of material in the two collections which resembles each other, and occasionally the parallels are close to verbatim. At the same time, the clear thirty-chapter structure of the Egyptian text is lacking and on a number of occasions the Hebrew thought develops in a different direction. My own view is that Amenemopet lies in the background of the proverbial material, but that the Hebrew author took such a degree of liberty with respect to both form and content, that the value of the Egyptian text for any text-critical work is virtually nil. For an overview of the discussion see McKane (1970:371-74) and more recently Whybray (1994b).

[34] The names Agur and Jaqeh are attested on 8th century BC ostraca from Arabia and are likely to be of Arabic origin. References to Massah are made in 1 Chr 1:30, and in Assyrian texts (Gottlieb 1991:280). For translation of Prov 30:1 with textual notes see p. 89.

[35] It is worth noting that the same is true of the book of Job, where in particular the frame of the book uses יהוה repeatedly.

that Yahweh was not considered by the sages to a be a local deity, but rather as having a universal sphere of influence; his activity could be seen in different environments and by different peoples, even those not partaking in Israel's cult. This stands in contrast to the Yahwism of the prophetic and legal traditions, which tends to have a negative attitude toward foreign imports. The combination of this perspective with the systematic and virtually exclusive use of יהוה suggests strongly that such a view was not commonplace at the time when the theologically explicit material in the book was being formed; the use of the divine name in Proverbs is *de facto* apologetic.

It is possible, therefore, to conclude from the handling of the appearance of תְּהוֹם on the scene in Prov 8:22ff. and from the way the personal name יהוה is used, that in spite of the underlying polytheistic roots, the tradition as it is captured in the book in fact reflects a religion of a single God. Yet, at the same time, the term monotheism may not adequately capture the book's perspective, for the cosmological picture in Proverbs is rather complex.[36] First of all, we have to consider what or who is the enigmatic figure of Wisdom. She has been interpreted in a number of different ways, yet, it is my view that if we limit its identification to what the text itself has to say (rather than trying to make it conform to some external concept), the way in which she can be understood is fairly limited. First of all, while it is possible that the figure of Wisdom originated in a polytheistic myth (see Lang 1986), in the present shape of the text she is not portrayed as a goddess, for there is no indication that she should be worshipped and further, she does not directly interfere with humanity's destiny.[37] Her sole role, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is to mediate true

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[36] The difficulties in describing the theological perspective here are symptomatic of a larger terminological problem. For a wider discussion of the suitability of the term *monotheism* as applied to Jewish theological thought prior to the Middle Ages see Hayman (1991b).

[37] Kayatz (1966:93-119) brought attention to a number of similarities between Wisdom and the Egyptian goddess of order and justice, Maat. However, simple identification of Wisdom with Maat is problematic (von Rad 1972:153-54). The main difference in my view is the fact that Maat *is* the order, i.e., 'one speaks *maat*, does *maat* and follows *maat* ... [even] the gods [live] by *maat*' (Whybray 1965a:55), while Wisdom merely *reveals* the order, i.e., she speaks truth and her lips dislike wickedness [Prov 8:6-9].

understanding but the consequences of accepting or rejecting it are not brought about by her.[38] Seeing Wisdom as a hypostasis of Yahweh (e.g. Ringgren 1947:95-106) is in my view precluded by the fact that she is not a divine attribute, but rather something that God brought into being, and by the child-parent imagery of Prov 8:22ff, both of which suggest that Wisdom has an entirely independent existence of Yahweh.

Yet, although she is not a deity or hypostasis, the fact that Wisdom functions as a mediatrix between Yahweh and humanity precludes understanding her as a mere personification of an impersonal order, for the mediatory role requires that the underlying reality for which she stands is understood in personal terms (*pace* von Rad, 1972:144-76). Also, the proverbial material indicates quite clearly that the persona of Wisdom is not a subjective concept that could be broadly summarised under the categories of knowledge and intellectual faculties, or lack of them (*pace* Fox, 1997), for Wisdom not only pre-dates the creation of humanity but she retains her autonomy from humans, just as she exists independently of God.[39] Thus the text leaves us with a personal understanding of Wisdom, who, while not strictly speaking divine, enjoys a very close association with יהוה, portrayed in the terms of a relationship between father and a child, and, as Boström (1990:83) puts it, '[she] is nearly identical with the Lord in the terms of authority.'

An additional insight is offered by the extremely important, yet, sometimes overlooked fact that Wisdom exists in a permanent opposition to the other female person of those chapters, Folly.[40] In contrast to Wisdom, nothing is specifically said

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[38] This is most clearly seen in Prov 1:24ff where she is a mere observer of the calamity that befalls the fools, and Prov 8:35 shows that it is Yahweh who is responsible for the blessing that comes from accepting Wisdom.

[39] The incident of her mocking the fools who turn to her for help in time of trouble having previously rejected her [Prov 1:24ff.] shows quite clearly that the access to her is not controlled by humans.

[40] Blenkinsopp (1991) attempted to argue that the figure of Wisdom is only secondary in origin to the strange woman of Prov 1-9, but that is in my view unlikely. Strictly speaking the figure of Wisdom does not stand in antithesis to the strange woman, but to the personified Folly in Prov 9. The strange woman is one of flesh and blood, and although I am inclined to think that a secondary contrast between her and Wisdom is intended in Prov 7, her real antithesis is the flesh and blood wife of Prov 5.

about the origins and the source of Folly, but throughout the book fools create havoc and destruction, and so it can be surmised that Folly is a representation of the forces of chaos, the primeval תְּהוֹם, and the silence about the origins of Folly has similar causes as that concerning the origins of תְּהוֹם. When considering the relationship between the two women, we should observe that they are on an identical mission; they are both in active pursuit of humanity, trying to gain followers.[41] In fact, the invitations that each gives to the passers-by are in principle similar; they both claim to know what is beneficial to human beings and furthermore, both of them focus especially on the impressionable פֶּתִי. Thus, any conclusions that are drawn about the nature of Wisdom, have to be equally applied to Folly; she needs to be understood in personal terms. The difference between the two women is mainly in their approach to life; Wisdom advocates ethical behaviour as a route to success, while Folly rejects ethics as irrelevant [Prov 9:17].

From the observations made so far about the relationship between God, Wisdom and humanity we can conclude that the two women are not mere poetic embellishments, for while a poetic language and techniques are used, there is no doubt that the sages speak of something they consider very real, with an independent objective existence. Folly is not simply the absence of Wisdom, nor is Wisdom the absence of Folly; they both have an individual existence in their own right. In other words, there is an implicit dualism present in the cosmology of Proverbs. Consequently, a peculiar picture of a two tier divine domain emerges. On the one hand we have the sovereign creator and ruler יהוה, on the other hand, within the context of his rule we observe a battle between the two personae of Wisdom and

[41] Prov 1:20ff; 8:1ff; 9:1ff concerning Wisdom, and Prov 9:13 and to a degree also Prov 7 with respect to Folly (it is my view that the editorial intention was that אִשָּׁה זָרָה would be seen not only as a woman of flesh and blood but also as an antithetical character to Dame Wisdom, although in the original story the woman is undoubtedly an ordinary mortal).

Folly,[42] leaving us with an obvious tension between the tiers, only one of which is dualistic.

It is necessary to consider what led the sages to postulate such a framework. The dualistic aspect of this perspective is simply a reflection of the sage's daily experience. The persistent tension between the righteous and the wicked, between good and evil, is very real to them. The problem with the foolish and wicked, is not, as we will see in chapter 4, that their behaviour is self-destructive, but that it seriously damages, indeed threatens, the community which they are part of. The dualistic framework makes the seriousness of this threat very tangible. Further, it allows the sages to completely disassociate God from the fools; the proverbial God cannot be held responsible for the damage that is the result of Folly's activity.

However, had the sages maintained a purely dualistic view of the world, they would not have been able to affirm a clear pre-eminence of Wisdom over Folly, and, thus, to make any claims that their way was superior to that of the fools; if Wisdom and Folly are equal forces, then the two blueprints offered by them are equally valid approaches to life. To avoid this, the proverbial outlook must not be dualistic in the final analysis. The sages achieved it by eliminating any dualism from the upper tier of their cosmological perspective.

As a result of this ingenious solution, Wisdom and Folly are in principle equals, capable of making a serious impact on the lives of those who follow them (and thus allowing the sages to make sense of their daily experience), but Wisdom has a powerful backer while Folly has none. In this way the wise are given an ultimate edge over the fools without the seriousness of the impact that folly makes on the life of its followers being entirely denied.

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[42] This persistent war is in fact an extension of Yahweh's taming of תְּהוֹם in the process of creation. Yet, it is important to grasp that this conflict is portrayed in Proverbs as being waged on the earthly battlefield, with human beings being part of the battle. Wisdom is a mediatrix between God and humanity, conveying the nature of the divine order to human beings and leading them to follow it. It is the human followers of Wisdom, not Wisdom herself, who effectively create the order and defeat the chaos in the human world.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this framework of the divine domain. Since it perfectly suits the needs of the basic bipolar paradigm that we find in Proverbs, yet, from the theological point of view it does not give an answer to the question of the origin of folly, merely putting it aside, it is almost certain that this theological framework was derived from the wisdom paradigm and not vice versa. Thus, we can see that the theological questions are, as it was asserted earlier on, of only secondary importance to the proverbial sages. Further, we can see that the bipolar nature of the proverbial paradigm goes deeper than merely dividing people into wise and fools; it is engraved into the very nature of the entire cosmos. The heavenly realm was seen by the sages as a place of persistent battle between forces of order and chaos, and although their theological perspective is not entirely dualistic, the dualism plays a critical part in it, disassociating God from Folly, and thus consequently from evil.

Having considered the overall 'layout' of the divine domain, it is time to turn our attention to the proverbial view of God himself, and the proverbial religious attitudes. The descriptive rather than defining use of the divine name, seen in its application to the non-Israelite sections of Proverbs, implies that the identification of Yahweh in Proverbs must be based on his character, which can be witnessed in the world, rather than national, territorial and cultic factors. This perspective does explain the lack of involvement of the book with the cultic issues, since with this concept of Yahweh's identity, the Yahwistic cult is by its very nature only a special case, or a particular expression, of the more general principles which govern interaction between the human and the divine. The logical conclusion of such a stance is that the harmony with the divine character must take precedence over the formal conformity with cultic practice, and this attitude is expressed explicitly in the book on several occasions. Consider the following passages:

> The sacrifice of wicked people is an abomination to Yahweh, but the prayer of the righteous is his pleasure. The wicked man's way is abomination to Yahweh, but he loves one who pursues righteousness. [Prov 15:8-9]
>
> Yahweh is distant from the wicked people, but he listens to the prayer of the righteous ones. [Prov 15:29]

> To do what is righteous and just is preferable to Yahweh than a sacrifice. [Prov 21:3]
>
> The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination,[43] how much more when he brings it in deviousness. [Prov 21:27]

While cultic practice is acknowledged in all of these, only rarely does the book admonish one to engage in cultic activity *per se*. In fact, one could almost gain the impression that the cult is not worth the trouble, that it is dispensable:

> In loyalty and truth guilt is atoned for, and in the fear of Yahweh [one] turns away from evil. [Prov 16:6]
>
> The man who says:[44] 'this is holy!', is being trapped, but after vows [have been made, they are] to be bestowed.[45] [Prov 20:25]

However, at least on one occasion [Prov 3:9] the sages encourage involvement with the cult, and this, in combination with the earlier observed systematic use of יהוה, renders the simple conclusion that the sages rejected the cult untenable. Rather, the sages understood the Yahwistic religion in much broader terms than a narrowly defined set of cultic rituals. The proverbial Yahwism finds its centre not in the formal cult but in the concept of *fear of Yahweh*, which we will deal with in chapter 5.

The observations concerning the divine domain made so far can be summarised as follows. The divine sphere is inaccessible to humans, it belongs to one God referred to as יהוה. His influence is not limited by national boundaries, and his character can be witnessed in the world by all those who seek to understand the world. In relationship to this God cultic practice is of only secondary importance, the proverbial emphasis is on ethical obligations rooted in the divine character and demand. In spite of the fact that Yahweh is the only and sovereign deity in the theological framework of the book, a continuous battle between the forces of order and chaos takes place within the divine domain, represented by the figures of Wisdom and Folly. These two are equals in terms of their potential to make an impact on human life, but the former is backed by Yahweh and as a result

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[43] 𝔊 + κυρίῳ, but that is interpretative, as the deity is clearly implied by the sacrificial language.
[44] The root and meaning of יָלַע is unclear, but in the context a *verbum dicendi* is expected.
[45] 𝔐 לְבַקֵּר; 𝔊 renders B colon freely μετὰ γὰρ τὸ εὔξασθαι μετανοεῖν γίνεται, *to change [his] mind having made a vow.*

permanently has the upper hand. Thus, while in theory the proverbial outlook is monotheistic, in practical terms it is dualistic.[46]

Sheol

The next segment of the tripartite world is Sheol, the land of the dead. This sphere is sometimes perceived in terms of two figures in the ANE mythologies and traces of such a concept are also found in Proverbs:

> Sheol and Abaddon are never sated, and the eyes of man are never sated. [Prov 27:20]
>
> Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh, how much more hearts of sons of men. [Prov 15:11]

While in the first case it needs to be noted that the pair appear here possibly only for poetic reasons, to form a more suitable parallel to the pair of eyes, in the second example there are no such poetic reasons; the B colon could easily have been formulated so as to produce rhythmic balance to a shorter A colon with Sheol alone. It is, therefore, likely that the sages' notion of Sheol closely resembled that of other ANE cultures, but the information contained in the book itself is rather limited. We know that Sheol is entered at the point of death and is inhabited by the רְפָאִים [Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16], but it is not possible for us to determine from the book itself who these beings are and what role they play in the underworld.

While we cannot form a very clear picture of what Sheol is like from the book, its significance to the sages is rather unambiguous. Sheol represents to them the complete end of any meaningful existence. Consider the following passage:

> Should they say: 'Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us wait for the innocent just for fun.[47] Let us swallow them alive — like Sheol,[48] and in one piece,[49] like those who descend to the pit.' [Prov 1:11-12]

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[46] Thus, the application of the term *monotheism* to the book is problematic, to say the least (*pace* Boström 1990:88).

[47] Lit. *without cause*.

The robbers, waiting to ambush and kill a person, compare themselves to Sheol. By implication, Sheol is a violent and destructive place, one where a person does not want to be of their own choice.

Significantly, Sheol is usually associated with folly [e.g. Prov 5:5; 7:27; 9:18], while wisdom is perceived as capable of preventing one from descending to Sheol [Prov 15:24; 23:14]. Yet, this is not to be understood in absolute terms. Nowhere is it asserted in Proverbs that the wise will not die; having made this claim, some comments are due on three particular sayings. The first of these is Prov 12:28:

בְּאֹרַח־צְדָקָה חַיִּים וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אַל־מָוֶת׃

The Hebrew of this verse is clearly corrupt, the B colon being syntactically impossible and making little sense as it stands. The interpreters divide broadly into two camps, one that wishes to preserve the negative אַל found in L, others who follow the versions and many Hebrew manuscripts reading אֶל instead; in both cases נְתִיבָה has to be emended. The problem with the former approach is that it requires one to assume that the negative is employed contrary to the normal usage and to ignore its imperative force. Thus, for instance, Dahood (1960) accepts Deilitzsch's view that מות is a participle and אַל־מָוֶת means *there is no dying*, but such a construction would normally use אֵין; overall Dahood's proposal to vocalise דֶּרֶךְ and understand נְתִיבָה as containing 3fs sfx, i.e., *the treading of her path is immortality*, is not convincing. In my view the best solution appears that of Tourney (quoted by McKane 1970:451) to emend נְתִיבָה to פִּתְּי בָּא; the difference being plausibly explained by an audible error. Obviously, the meaning of the text is entirely dependent on the particular emendation or exception to the standard Hebrew usage

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[48] Or *let us swallow them as Sheol swallows life* (McKane (1970:221). Oesterley (8) points out a personification of Sheol in Isa 5:14, and O'Callaghan (1954:169) brings attention to the image of Mot's hungry mouth in the Baal Epic.

[49] So McKane (1970:269), who sees here reference to Mot, possibly also *completely* (see the note above).

that an interpreter chooses. It is certainly not possible to speak of immortality in Proverbs on the grounds of this verse alone.

The second saying that needs a few comments in this respect is Prov 14:32:

בְּרָעָתוֹ יִדְּחֶה רָשָׁע וְחֹסֶה בְּמוֹתוֹ צַדִּיק׃

The referent of the suffix of בְּמוֹתוֹ is unclear and may be either the wicked or the righteous, the matter being further complicated by the lack of clarity of חֹסֶה, for as McKane (1970:475) points out, the notion behind חסה is that of seeking refuge, not finding it. It is most likely that, as 𝔊 indicates, 𝔐 is corrupted and we should read בְּתֻמּוֹ, *in his integrity*, resulting in a superior parallel to *his evil*, and render

> By his evil the wicked is brought down, but the righteous seeks a refuge even in his integrity.

There is one more saying that could be used to challenge the claim that the notion of immortality is foreign to Proverbs:

> The path of life leads upwards[50] for the intelligent person, so that it turns away from Sheol below. [Prov 15:24]

It is tempting to understand the contrast below/upwards as referring to two kinds of afterlife, but such a reading arises out of a preconceived theological perspective rather than the text itself. As the netherworld is pictured here to be located beneath the surface of the earth, movement upwards is the natural poetic expression for releasing Sheol's hold on a person. It should be noted that in the imagery there is no locality contrasting Sheol. The verse is not concerned with going to some place other than Sheol, but with the ability of the intelligent person to keep a distance from it. Neither of these two verses can, therefore, be used to argue for a concept of meaningful afterlife in Proverbs.

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[50] 𝔐 לְמַעְלָה, supported by 𝔖 ܠܥܠܐ, *upwards*. 𝔊 διανοήματα, *thoughts*, most likely due to a misunderstanding or reinterpretation on behalf of the translator. McKane (1970:479) is of the view that 𝔊 did not have לְמַעְלָה and מָטָּה in its Vorlage, but it should be noted that while these are not translated in 𝔊, there are substitutions for both words — 𝔊 is clearly not translating Hebrew text that would simply have the two words missing.

Nor is there any indication that the most abstract word for life that BH has, חַיִּים, refers in Proverbs to anything else but the earthly human experience. Consider the following verses:

> My son, do not forget my teaching, may your heart guard my commands. For they will add to you length of days and years of life, and peace. [Prov 3:1-2]
>
> Blessed is a man [who] has found wisdom … length of days is in her right hand, wealth and glory in her left … She is [the] tree of life, whoever grasp her and lay hold of her, each one of them[51] is blessed.
> [Prov 3:13, 16, 18]
>
> For with me [i.e. Wisdom] your days will multiply and years of life will be added to you. [Prov 9:11].[52]

The overall picture is not of wisdom leading to immortality, but rather of wisdom preventing untimely death. The conclusion that the proverbial sages did not believe in any meaningful existence after death is hard to avoid.

The World of the Living

The sages showed limited curiosity about heaven, and their interest in death and Sheol is limited to avoiding it; the real arena for exercising wisdom is the sphere of the living. It is this tangible world that the sages sought to understand, and ultimately use that understanding to their own benefit. This domain is the result of the creative activity of God. Our primary insight into the proverbial understanding of the origins of the cosmos comes again from Prov 8:22-31 quoted above. However, it needs to be pointed out that this text is not intended as a source of detailed information about the process of creation. Rather, its primary purpose is to strengthen the claims that wisdom is the key to successful life by showing that Wisdom knows all that is to be known about the human world. Thus, while the text speaks about the creative activity of God, it quite clearly assumes that the reader has some prior knowledge on the subject.

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[51] Note the shift from pl. to sg; ֗, ֜ read pl., but that is most likely an attempt to smooth the text.
[52] For textual notes see p. 68.

The human world, designated by the Hebrew words אֶרֶץ and תֵּבֵל, emerges as Yahweh imposes order on the forces of chaos, referred to as תְּהוֹם. This subjugation of the chaos is pictured in three stages:

> When he established the heavens, I was there, when he engraved the horizon upon the surface of the primeval ocean, when he made the sky above firm, when he overpowered the springs of the primeval ocean, when he set for the sea its limit (so that water would not cross its edge), when he hollowed out the foundations of the earth. [Prov 8:27-29][53]

First, an upper limit is imposed on תְּהוֹם by which a higher region is created, the heavens. The upper boundary is called here שְׁחָקִים. In the second stage, limits are imposed on the chaos from beneath, when Yahweh overpowers and restrains its sources, עִינוֹת. After this stage the primeval waters cease to be called תְּהוֹם, and are referred to as יָם or מַיִם, which is probably to reflect the diminishing power of chaos. In the final stage, the sea is limited alongside the horizontal plane and the foundations of the land are laid.

The key characteristic of the cosmos as presented in this text is its orderliness. God not only created the world but he also set boundaries to its individual elements by taming the initial chaos. It is this orderliness that lies at the heart of the proverbial understanding and allows the sages to predict how a person's life is to unfold in the future on the basis of their present actions. While the presence of this orderliness in the proverbial perception of the world is broadly accepted by the interpreters, its nature, and more specifically the precise character of the link between actions and their consequences, has been a subject of scholarly debate for some time.

There are two basic models. In the first one, retributive justice is in operation, with God being its administrator. In the second model, there is a simple action-consequence order built-in, where each act produces a particular outcome automatically, without the need for divine involvement. Such an understanding was first proposed by Koch (1983), who argued that 'there is not even a single convincing

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[53] For textual notes see p. 63.

reference to suggest a retribution teaching [in Proverbs]. ... We ... find ... a conviction that Yahweh pays close attention to the connection between actions and destiny, hurries it along, and "completes" it when necessary' (p. 64). Rather than being retributive, the mechanism by which actions and their consequences are linked is characterised by an inherent relationship between the nature of the action and its consequence, and further, it operates in terms of either blessing or destruction with no differentiation according to the severity of the triggering action (p. 59-60).

Quite clearly the two models are mutually exclusive, and lead to a rather different understanding of the proverbial world and theology. I will, therefore, examine Koch's action-consequence model in some detail, in order to see whether it can be successfully applied to the book. Much weight is given by Koch to the fact that the relationship between an action and its consequences is simply expressed or assumed in the majority of the proverbial sayings, but nothing is said about the mechanism of this relationship. He deduces from this that the consequences are directly and automatically brought about by the action itself. As all conclusions drawn from silence are problematic, it is necessary to consider whether the lack of information about the action-consequence mechanism cannot be accounted for on other grounds, and if so, whether such an explanation may not be more plausible.

First of all, some consideration must be given to the proverbial genre. A proverb typically consists of less than a dozen words. Thus the amount of detail it can deal with is significantly limited. The author will have to make a strict choice about what to include and what to leave out. This is further complicated by the fact that a proverb needs to retain a relative autonomy; it must be possible to understand the sense of the proverb without a fixed literary context. As a result, a proverb cannot but schematise. Thus, it should be expected that it will express only the minimal information which is essential to conveying the message on the author's mind. If the author's intention is to draw attention to a link between particular actions and particular consequences (and this certainly is the case in much of the material in Proverbs), what the author cannot omit is the depiction of the action and of the

related consequence. The one thing that he can afford to leave out are the details of the actual process that links them. More so, this is something that the author may even wish to omit, for proverbs are paradigms, and paradigms are intended to transfer input data into output information without having to go into the details of the internals. Take for example this well known saying:

> Who digs a pit may[54] fall into it, and who rolls a stone it may roll back over[55] him. [Prov 26:27]

The intention is to warn one from the dangers of digging a pit. This can be understood in a number of ways, literally, metaphorically, or even as referring to malicious intent. In any case, it is of little importance whether one may slip into the pit while digging it, or fall into it later having forgotten about it, or any other way. What matters is *what* may happen, not *how* it may happen and the fact that the *how* is not expressed prevents us from limiting the *how* to a single mode.[56]

Since the nature of the form is such that it seriously limits the amount of detail discussed, both by necessity and design, no definite conclusions about the nature of the relationship between action and consequence can be made unless this relationship is more explicitly described in the material. This, in turn, requires that we interpret the silence in the light of the limited number of sayings that offer a more detailed insight into the action-consequence chain, and not vice versa; failure to do so is a significant methodological fallacy that casts doubts on the validity of the action-consequence model.[57]

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[54] The Px should probably not be rendered *falls / will fall* (e.g. Toy 479), since such an assertion is of gnomic character, and gnomic notions are expressed in the proverbial material by Sx.

[55] 𝔐 אֵלָיו requires such a rendering in the context, cf. 𝔊.

[56] See also Boström (1990:112).

[57] An objection could be raised at this point that such an approach assumes that the two types of material represent the same school of thought. I wish to make two brief points in addressing such an objection. First, this study limits itself to a synchronic examination of the book. The present aim is to understand the worldview conveyed by the book in its totality and it is from this starting point that this approach stems (in fact Koch does not argue that there are two different schools of thought in Proverbs, so that this approach is fully valid in critiquing his model). Second, all attempts to separate the proverbial material into groups that represent significantly different schools of thought, typically religious vs. secular, have so far failed (the most thorough attempt was made by McKane 1970, for a critique of which see Wilson 1987 and Weeks 1994:57-73). While I do not wish to exclude such a

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I now want to examine at least some of the material which provides more specific information about the link between actions and consequences in Proverbs, to test the action-consequence model further. The main difference between the two models is in the role God plays in them. In the action-consequence model Yahweh is not a free agent, but a passive executor, whose behaviour is determined by the inherent link between action and its consequence; the consequences that one suffers as a result of one's actions are not in any way modifiable by him. The only control he has is over the speed with which the inherent relationship materialises. Further, and possibly more importantly, the mechanism must also be able to function without his involvement, automatically, otherwise it is meaningless to talk about built-in consequences.

There are a number of occasions in the book, where a particular action is described as pleasing or displeasing to Yahweh, for instance:

> False scales are an abomination to Yahweh, but an honest weight is his pleasure. [Prov 11:1]

I cannot but agree with Koch that such verses ultimately imply that God is going to respond in some appropriate way (p. 62). Yet, it should be noticed that by saying that something is an abomination to Yahweh, Yahweh's value judgement on the action is expressed. Thus, it is unavoidably implied that the criteria for the appropriate response is inherent to Yahweh, rather than to the action itself. If the consequences were permanently built-in, Yahweh's value judgement would be irrelevant.

The concept of *fear of Yahweh*, which I have previously touched on, points in a similar direction. If the consequences of actions are permanently and unchangeably built-in, humans are not only fully in control of their own lives, but also of God who ceases to be a power to reckon with, to fear, to worship or to trust. It becomes

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possibility in principle, in the light of the brevity built into the genre it seems that a convincing case could only be made on the grounds of some additional, external information about the origins of wisdom in Israel, not from the proverbial material *per se*.

impossible to talk about any real person-to-person relationship between human beings and God, yet, this is precisely what we find in Proverbs:

> As for Yahweh's discipline, my son, do not reject [it] and do not loathe [it] when he rebukes you. For whom Yahweh loves he rebukes, but like a father he delights in his son. [Prov 3:11-12][58]

Here God is not a detached courier of consequences out of his control, but his involvement with a person has a clear emotive element, he is compared to a loving father disciplining a child. Parental discipline is not simply about inflicting punishment, but about moulding the child for his or her own benefit. It is quite clearly implied here that the divine action is not a simple delivery of predefined consequences, but that the relationship between God and human beings is at least as complex as one between a human father and his children. We should also note, that the young man is not portrayed here as a fool who suffers for his folly. Rather, these verses imply a situation in which the treatment the young man may receive appears to be inappropriate or disproportionate to his actions. Immediately before, he was admonished to trust God and rely on him and was promised prosperity in return. In that context vv. 11-12 can have only one possible function, to stand as a guard against absolutisation of the promises and as an explanation of situations where a person trusts God, but the immediate reward seems to be lacking.

That the relationship between God and humans is dynamic rather than static is also indicated by the references to prayers of the righteous [e.g. Prov 15:29]. These show that Yahweh's behaviour can be influenced. We cannot conceive of prayer here as yet another simple action with a built-in consequence, because it is implied that only the prayer of the righteous can achieve any positive result [Prov 15:9, 28]. Further, even God's protection of the righteous is not always seen as automatic. Consider the following verse:

> Yahweh's name is a fortified tower, a righteous person runs into it and is inaccessible. [Prov 18:10]

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[58] For textual notes see p. 73.

The righteous person's protection does not originate in the righteousness *per se*, but in Yahweh's name, i.e., an active invocation of God, here expressed in the poetic terms of running. Again the indications are that the relationship between God and the outcome of a person's behaviour is not entirely straightforward.

We could point out a number of other notions found in the book that speak against the action-consequence model in a similar manner, and I will just briefly list some of them before moving on to one final and major problem of the action-consequence theory. Both humble and glorified states are appropriate for the wise [e.g. Prov 15:16, 33], and the right choices sometimes mean lack of material prosperity. Again, this suggests that a person's present state is not determined by previous actions in any simple manner. Elsewhere, we come across the idea that God considers not only the actions, but also the hidden attitudes [Prov 15:11; 17:3]. This introduces yet another variable that influences what happens to a person, for which a simple action-consequence model cannot account. In Prov 19:14 we find a comparison between receiving an inheritance and finding a prudent wife. The main thrust of the verse seems to be that finding a prudent wife cannot be taken for granted, i.e., the sage does not seem to have any clear advice for the young man on how to find such a wife, or, in other words, there does not seem to be a very clear and predictable action-consequence relationship. An entirely unambiguous statement about God's ultimate control over the results of human undertaking is Prov 21:31. Here it is plainly asserted that human activities that are essential to military success, are no guarantee of it. Prov 21:1 goes even further, declaring that Yahweh has absolute control not only over the consequences, but also over the actions of a king.

While the cumulative weight of the evidence presented so far is in my view sufficient to reject the action-consequence model, there is one further aspect of Yahweh's role in Proverbs that speaks forcibly against it, and which is also an essential part of the Proverbial perception of God and the world. Repeatedly, throughout the book, we find God in the function of a judge and executor of justice. Consider this scene at the gate:

> Do not steal from the impoverished because he is impoverished, and do not crush the poor in the gate. For Yahweh fights their case and will squeeze[59] life from those who rob them. [Prov 22:22-23]

The terminology that is employed in v. 23A, יְהוָה יָרִיב רִיבָם, is unmistakably legal. God is portrayed here as an enforcer of justice, who will fight the case of the oppressed with the result of robbing the oppressor. The verse goes far beyond claiming that the oppressor will have to make restitution to the poor, and it is hard not to understand it as implying that Yahweh is going to impose *punishment* on the offender, i.e., the verse is talking about retribution. Consider also the following proverb:

> A good person meets favour from Yahweh, but he convicts a scheming man. [Prov 12:2]

Here we find Hiphil of רשׁע which Koch suggests means *to treat someone as guilty and thus afflict them* (p. 63). However, the transitive Hiphil of this verb has a technical juridical sense, meaning *to pronounce someone guilty* (KBL^2). There is no indication in this verse that we should not understand the verb in this regular sense. Quite clearly, Yahweh functions here as a judge. Here is yet another picture of a courtroom scene:

> Rescue those taken to death, and those staggering to be killed, surely,[60] you should keep [them] back.[61] Indeed, you may say: 'mercy, we[62] did not know this',[63] does not he who examines hearts understand and he who guards[64] your life, [does not] he know? And he will repay to man according to his deed. [Prov 24:11-12]

While v. 11 is somewhat obscure, the legal thrust of v. 12 is unmistakable. Koch is aware that the Hiphil of שׁוב found here has a definite juridical usage, but he suggests interpreting it as Yahweh 'turn[ing] (the effects of) an action back/towards the

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[59] 𝔐 קבע is difficult, I follow here the suggestion of Cody (1980:425) based on evidence from Arabic.
[60] 𝔐 אִם; McKane (1970:400) takes this with a negative force as in oaths, but due to the obscurity of the meaning of v. 11 the force is difficult to evaluate.
[61] 𝔊 adds negative: μὴ φείσῃ, *do not draw back*, but the 𝔊 text makes little sense, most likely the Vorlage was corrupted.
[62] 𝔊 reads sg., but that is most likely an attempt to smooth the text; the pl. should be retained, as it has a rhetorical force. The speaker here not only excuses his failure to act, but also implicitly invokes the failure of others in his defence.
[63] Toy (446) prefers to follow 𝔙 and understand this as *it is not in my power*, but such a rendering is not justified.
[64] 𝔐 נֹצֵר; 𝔊 ὁ πλάσας, *who formed*, i.e., יֹצֵר. 𝔐 forms a slightly better parallel with Ab.

person' (p. 63). Yet, if we consider the first half of the verse (which Koch does not, referring only to 24:12b!), it is obvious that the whole process involves close scrutiny on behalf of Yahweh, scrutiny that goes beyond the surface action to the motivations of the heart. We can thus hardly perceive Yahweh's role as mechanistic, automatically setting in motion the consequence triggered by the action.

That Yahweh has the function of a judge is also clear in this proverb:

> Many seek the face of a ruler, but man's justice is from Yahweh. [Prov 29:26]

This verse has a chiastic A-B-C-C'-B'-A' structure on the semantic level, which presents us with two courtrooms, earthly and heavenly.[65] In the human court there are many seeking justice, but only the divine judge in the divine court is able to provide it.

There are some places where even Koch is forced to admit that Yahweh plays some active role:

> If one who hates you is hungry, feed him with bread[66] and if he is thirsty give him water to drink, For you are raking burning coals upon his head and Yahweh will recompense you. [Prov 25:21-22]

Koch suggests that the common rendering of the verb שׁלם in v. 22 as *to reward* is unfounded, and that the original sense of the root, *to be complete* is appropriate here. 'Yahweh "completes" the good action of the person … by means of the appropriate consequences which follow' (p. 60). Koch is right that שׁלם does not mean *to reward*. The notion expressed by the verb is essentially of one person making a contribution to another person to a degree necessary for restoring a disturbed equilibrium. In the present context the person suffers a loss at the hands of someone else but is encouraged not to resort to the natural way to recover this loss. Instead, it is asserted that God will compensate the person, i.e., God will provide whatever is necessary to restore the disturbed equilibrium. שׁלם here does not refer to the

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[65] רַבִּים מְבַקְשִׁים פְּנֵי־מוֹשֵׁל וּמֵיְהוָה מִשְׁפַּט־אִישׁ where A - רַבִּים, A' - אִישׁ; B - מְבַקְשִׁים פְּנֵי; B' - מִשְׁפַּט; C - מוֹשֵׁל; C' - יְהוָה.

[66] Omitted by versions, also *water* in the B colon (cf. Rom 12:10).

completion of the person's inactivity, but of the reversal of the person's initial loss. God is not completing the 'good' action. Rather, he is supplying the action which would have naturally recovered the loss and which the person was advised to avoid — the source of the compensation is not the human passivity but the divine activity; the human passivity would not result in restoration of the equilibrium if God did not act.

It should be clear by now that if one wishes to postulate a system of action-consequence that accommodates the observations made so far, it will have to be more complex than a simple linear relationship between an action and its consequences such as that postulated by Koch. Such a model fails to account for what is clearly the rather complex nature of Yahweh's involvement in the chain of events between human actions and their ultimate consequences. In the proverbial world, Yahweh is the ultimate decision-maker, one who *determines* the appropriate consequences. These are not decided on the basis of the past actions alone. There is also a relational factor present, as the wisdom concept of *fear of Yahweh* manifests, and God considers attitudes as well as actions; the divine judge, who is absolutely just, is an inseparable part of the proverbial world.

The observations made here lead to very much the same conclusion as that of Boström (1990:136-39):

> The term 'order' is appropriate as a designation of the world-view of the sages. The book of Proverbs in the main believes in a world which is characterized by regularity, order and harmony. ... [T]he belief in the character-consequence relationship, though forcefully asserted, was to a certain extent 'tentative' and not without vacillation, even though this rarely comes to expression in the book. ... However, ... if one is to make use of the term 'order' to signify the world-view of Israelite wisdom, it must first be qualified theologically as the order which the Lord has established and upholds. ... Our investigation ... has led us to the conclusion that the world-view of the sages was neither built upon a concept of an impersonal order nor of actions with 'automatic,' built-in consequences, but on the active participation of the Lord in the affairs of men in conjunction with man's own responsibility.

The world is orderly, yet, this order is Yahweh's order. It has been put in place by him and it is subjected to his control. The predictability of this order, albeit subject to

exceptions, is not due to its fixed nature, but due to the implied stability of Yahweh's character.

The Makeup of Qoheleth's Cosmos

The Divine Sphere

Similarly to Proverbs, Qoheleth's world contains the three spheres that belong to God, to the living, and to the dead. Turning our attention initially to the divine domain, Qoheleth's comments on it are scarce. This he shares with the proverbial sages, with whom he considers it to be entirely separate from the human sphere, entirely outside of human reach [Qoh 5:1]. However, Qoheleth has plenty of things to say about God who occupies this domain, referring to God directly some forty times. While in the case of Proverbs a strict definition of the word *monotheistic* did not fully capture the book's outlook, Qoheleth's perspective is thoroughly monotheistic, in the most rigid sense of the word. There is not a single hint in the book that Qoheleth is prepared to consider more than one deity or a force of any kind in operation alongside God, nor is there any apologetic against polytheistic views. This latter fact is of some interest, for Hellenistic influence on the society of Qoheleth's day was significant, and the documented tension between traditional Judaism and the penetrating Hellenism would have been impossible to escape.[67] It is as if Qoheleth writes from and to a different, unreal, world in which there is only one God and where this issue is settled, for both him and his audience. It is quite tempting to suggest, that he might be addressing readers whose deliberation has moved well beyond the problems faced by the 'popular theology' of the day, what one may want to call an 'academic' audience.

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[67] As I have explained in chapter 2 (see note 56 on p. 76), I agree with the wide scholarly consensus that the book should be dated sometime in the third century BC.

In the context of Qoheleth's implied monotheistic stance it should be further noted that Qoheleth does not make any explicit references to Israel and its religious institutions, save alluding to Solomon and Jerusalem. While Proverbs does not show any real interest in these matters either, we saw that an attempt is made in the book to identify the God of the sages with יהוה. In contrast, Qoheleth refers to God exclusively as אֱלֹהִים, never using the tetragrammaton. Yet, in the light of the aforementioned reference to Jerusalem and the allusion to the splendour of the Solomonic court, it is not only almost certain that this implicit monotheism stems from Qoheleth's Jewish heritage, but also that he does not wish to distance himself from it. Why then does he not at least use the personal name יהוה in a manner the proverbial sages did?

The absence of the tetragrammaton cannot be explained as being due to the later tendency of Judaism not to use the personal name out of reverence, for it can be seen in Ben Sira that the use of it was still acceptable in pious (wisdom) circles of the mid second century. I am, therefore, inclined to think that Qoheleth does not use the personal name יהוה for precisely the same reasons that Proverbs made such a consistent use of it. As I argued previously, the systematic application of the name to all material in Proverbs is an expression of the belief that Yahweh is God of all the earth and of all peoples, and can be universally witnessed by those who seek to understand the world. Once this theological perspective is accepted, it is no more necessary to press the point in the manner attested in Proverbs and the reasoning can move further onto a more abstract level. Since the name is purely descriptive, and since there is but one God, the discussion would naturally move from the question *who is the true God?* solely to the question *what is God like?* and it is precisely on this level that Qoheleth operates.[68] In other words, it would appear that the

[68] This question plays an important role in the book, be it more often implied than expressed. It is precisely this question that is responsible for the unease which many a reader of the book senses. This is due to the fact that the logical question that follows next is whether *the God* is anything like the God of the cult, in this case Yahweh. Qoheleth does not address this latter question, but it does not take much to turn Qoheleth into a sceptical rejection of any real significance of the formal religion, especially since he does not feel the need to identify explicitly with Yahwism.

theological environment in which Qoheleth is placed is quite different from the one in which the proverbial sages found themselves. While יהוה was a universal God for the proverbial sages themselves, this perspective seems to have needed to be defended before those outside of the wisdom tradition; in contrast the book of Qoheleth attests no such need.[69]

The basic image of God in Qoheleth is that of a sovereign despot, who is fully in charge, has no obligations and is accountable to no-one. In no sense can humans deal with him on a par; he is not a God to be trifled with. This is the basic principle of Qoheleth's approach to human-God relationships, as it is expounded in Qoh 5:

> Watch your step[70] when you go to the house of God, and approach[71] more to obey[72] than to offer a sacrifice [as] the fools [do].[73] For they do not know they are about to do[74] evil.[75] Do not make your mouth to haste and do not let your heart hurry to utter a word before God. For God is in heaven and you upon the

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[69] This observation raises certain questions with respect to the historical setting of the two traditions. Although these are not of immediate interest for the present study, they are worth pursuing and will be addressed briefly in the Excursus.

[70] Lit. *foot*.

[71] The infa. has the function of an impv. (WOC 35.5.1). Fox (1989:210) reads noun/adjective, but if that was the case, i.e., if Ab was an explanation of the command in Aa, כִּי rather than וְ would to be expected, as elsewhere in the book.

[72] Gordis (1955a:237) argues for the sense *to understand*. However, considering the clearly cultic setting, the direct parallel with foolish sacrifices, and especially the emphasis on fulfilling vows, it is far more plausible to understand שמע in the sense suggested above, with a close parallel in 1 Sam 15:22.

[73] The syntax of this clause is difficult. The infc. מִתֵּת has two modifiers: (1) it forms a construct chain with הַכְּסִילִים (which is the rectum) - *giving of the fools*, as indicated by the accents; (2) it has a direct object זָבַח - *to give a sacrifice*. ֏ in my view understands the text correctly rendering somewhat freely ממשמע לתת זבח הכסילים כי אינם יודעים לעשות רע, i.e., *draw near to listen, it is better than offering of sacrifices of fools*. 𝔊, α' and θ' read ὑπέρ δόμα, i.e., מִמַּתָּן and 𝔊 reads further θυσία σου making θυσία σου the subject: *and [be] your sacrifice nearer to obeying than gift of the fools*, which somewhat softens the radical statement that no sacrifice at all is better than a bad sacrifice, which is more in line with Qoheleth's style.

[74] The infc. is problematic; the idiomatic expression ידע ל with infc. means *to know how to* but that does not seem to make sense in the context. ל + infc. can denote imminent future (WOC 36.2.3d, g), this use is found in elsewhere Qoheleth [e.g. Qoh 3:15] and fits very well with Qoh 5:1-6, especially 5:3 (cf. also Prov 15:8). Crenshaw (1988:114) prefers rendering by a present tense: *they are doing evil*, but it would appear in the context that Qoheleth is speaking from a point of view where foolish sacrifice can still be avoided. The suggestion that the fools are good, because they lack the brains to do evil (Gordis 1955a:238) is unconvincing in the context (cf. v. 3).

[75] Ogden's (1987b:76) rendering *havoc*, based on the assertion that רַע in Qoheleth refers only to calamities or enigmatic situations while רָעָה is used to refer to moral evil is misguided, for the two words are clearly synonymous in Qoh 8:11.

> earth. Therefore, let your words be few. For the dream comes with much occupation, and the voice of a fool with many words. When you made a vow before God, do not delay to fulfil it, for there is no delight in fools — what you vowed fulfil. One who does not vow is better [off] than one who vows and does not fulfil. Do not let[76] your mouth cause[77] your body to sin, and do not dispute with the messenger,[78] saying: 'This is a mistake!'. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and ruin the work of your hands? For amongst multiplying dreams and futile activities,[79] and excessive words,[80] surely fear God. [Qoh 4:17-5:6]

This is the only place in the book that Qoheleth touches upon cult in any detail.[81] This passage shows that Qoheleth does not reject the cult as meaningless. Indeed, he takes it very seriously, asserting that taking it lightly is seriously short-sighted and self-destructive. Here Qoheleth comes closest to the proverbial belief that God punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous, for while he is unable to affirm the general validity of that principle, it appears that even Qoheleth is not ready to suggest that God will suffer being personally abused and manipulated.

The passage above shows, that while Qoheleth never uses the phrase *fear of Yahweh* or *fear of God*, the concept is not foreign to him. It appears for the first time in Qoh 3:

> And I saw the occupation which God gave to the human beings to occupy/afflict [themselves] with. He makes everything beautifully in its time, he also put ignorance in their hearts, because of which man is not able to find the deeds which God does — from the beginning to the end. I came to know that there is nothing better for them but to rejoice and to do well in one's life. But also every man who can eat and drink and enjoy the fruit-of-his-labour — it is a gift of God. I came to know that whatever God may do, will be forever — it is impossible to add to it and it is impossible to subtract from it. And God does this so that they would fear him. [Qoh 3:10-14][82]

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[76] Lit. *do not give*.

[77] Reading Hiphil with an apocopated ה.

[78] 𝔊 (𝔖) + τοῦ θεοῦ which is almost certainly interpretative.

[79] This is the only place in the book outside of the inclusio Qoh 1:2 & 12:8 where הֶבֶל appears in pl. form, which suggests that it could be used here in a different manner than usually. Considering that the whole passage deals with cultic activities, there is a possibility that הַבָלִים has its normal OT sense here referring to idols, but more likely it is a reference to all and any human activity, all of which is in Qoheleth's view futile.

[80] Barton (1908:125) suggests that הַבָלִים and דִבָרִים should be transposed, but 𝔐 is supported by both 𝔊 and 𝔖, and there is no internal need for such an emendation.

[81] Additional passing reference to cultic practice can be found in Qoh 9:2.

[82] For textual notes see p. 80.

Qoheleth's God expects humans to fear him, and in fact took active steps to ensure that it would be so, by limiting human intellectual abilities and their practical capability to interfere with his designs. Thus, the fear of God derives from the awareness of the divine superiority. The fear itself is, as it transpires from Qoh 4:17-5:6 quoted earlier, the awareness and acceptance of the qualitative divide between God and the human race. In practical terms, it means avoiding any attempts to trifle with God, to make promises with no intention to fulfil them, and in general to take the cult light-heartedly. Therefore, although Qoheleth never uses the popular wisdom saying found in Proverbs and elsewhere that fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, he makes it quite clear that not fearing God is an act of sheer madness, and thus at least implies that wisdom and fear of God go hand in hand.

The problem Qoheleth is facing is not that he does not consider fear of God to be a wise and sensible attitude, but that he is unable to affirm that those who fear God fare any better than those who do not:

> Since the sentence of the evil deed is not carried out quickly, therefore the heart of sons of man is full within them to do evil — because a sinner does evil a hundred [times], yet his [life] is prolonged — although I know that it should be well with the fearers of God, those who keep fearing before him. And it should not be well with the wicked, and [his] days should not be prolonged like a shadow, because he did not fear before God. There is futility which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens as if they were wicked and there are wicked men, to whom it happens as if they were righteous. I said that also this is futile. [Qoh 8:11-14][83]

Qoheleth's experience teaches him that in the real world there are righteous people who suffer and wicked who prosper. Therefore, there is a tension between the last two quoted passages, one encouraging to fear God, the other admitting that it may make no observable difference. It is tempting to relegate the former text to a pious editor, but I am inclined to think that both of these texts originated from the same hand. The tension observed here is at the heart of Qoheleth's world which does not subject itself to human rationality — this is the way, Qoheleth believes, God

[83] For textual notes see p. 77.

intended it. The rationale for fearing God is not simply that it pays off, but that God is beyond human reach.

Sheol

In contrast to Proverbs where Sheol appears only as an acknowledged reality, but never the subject of deliberation, Qoheleth gives it some thought, but even for him it remains a great unknown:

> I thought to myself concerning[84] human beings: God makes clear[85] to them and shows[86] them that they are animals.[87] Indeed, as for the fate of[88] human beings, and the fate of an animal — [89]they have the same fate: as [is] death of this, so [is] death of the other and there is one breath to both. And there is no advantage to man over an animal, for both are passing.[90] They both are on [their] way to the same place — both came from the dust and both are returning to the dust. Who knows? Is the breath of the human beings ascending above and the breath of the animals descending beneath to the earth?[91] And I saw that there is nothing better than [if] man rejoices in his deeds for this is his portion. For who shall take him to look at that which will be afterwards?[92] [Qoh 3:18-22]

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[84] Delitzsch (267) links עַל־דִּבְרַת not with Qoheleth's thinking but with the divine activity, i.e., God does this *for the sake of sons of man*. However, if that was the case, one would expect some statement explaining what it is about this particular divine activity that is done for the sake of man. It is far more natural to link the clause with the preceding *verbum dicendi*.

[85] MH sense of ברר (see JAS). The BH sense is generally less abstract, *to purge out*, *to select*, *to polish*, but the process of abstractisation is already on the way, as is seen from the application of the adj. בָּרוּר to speech (e.g. Zeph 3:9). The sense *to select* is not appropriate in the context which does not assert exclusiveness of humanity (or some human beings) but rather the exact opposite. Gordis (1955a:226) thinks that לברם is a case of asseverative ל before Sx. I am more inclined to understand it as an infc. used as a finite form, a phenomenon that occurs in LBH (WOC 36.3.2a).

[86] Reading with 𝔊, 𝔙, and 𝔖 as a Hiphil with an apocopated ה.

[87] 𝔐 שְׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם; reading שֶׁהֵם־בְּהֵמָה לָהֶם. The pronoun הֵמָּה is not attested in 𝔊 and is probably a result of a dittography. The final לָהֶם functions as an indirect object of the preceding verb.

[88] Reading with the versions as a construct form. 𝔐 has a nominal clause: *for the sons of man are an accident, and an animal is an accident ...*

[89] Reading with many manuscripts and the versions מקרה instead of ומקרה - this is likely to be a scribal error due to parablepsis.

[90] Hebrew הֶבֶל, which I elsewhere translate *futile*, but here the emphasis is clearly on ephemerality.

[91] I follow the versions in understanding the initial ה of הָעֹלָה and הַיֹּרֶדֶת as an interrogative particle. Gordis (1955a:228) notes that there is a tendency to vocalise the interrogative particle in the same manner as the article when it stands before י or א (cf. Lev 10:19). Furthermore, even if one understands these as articles, the whole clause still clearly remains a question because of the initial מִי יוֹדֵעַ.

[92] The question can be understood in two ways, depending on the referent of the sfx on אַחֲרָיו: (1) no-one can come back from the dead to look at what will be after *him*; (2) no-one can be taken while still alive to have a preview of what will be *afterwards*, i.e., after death. The latter interpretation fits the

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It is possible that the deliberation about what happens to the human and animal רוּחַ at the point of death reflects familiarity with a belief in a meaningful afterlife, but it is not something to which Qoheleth himself appears to adhere. Irrespective of which interpretation of אַחֲרָיו is adopted (see note 92 above), the basic implications remain the same. There is no way that Qoheleth, or anyone else, can describe what happens after death. The world of the dead is not accessible to the living and vice versa. Consequently, Qoheleth's empirical methodology does not provide him with a definite answer to the possibility of a meaningful afterlife, yet, it is obvious, that he himself is sceptical in that matter. Sheol is a place of oblivion, where all that characterises human earthly striving ends, and it is quite possible that Sheol is nothing more for Qoheleth than a poetic image for non-existence:

> Whatever you may be able to do, do it with your vigour, for there is no deed or devising or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are [already] going. [Qoh 9:10][93]

Before moving on to consider the human domain, I wish to draw attention to two passages in the book immediately relevant to the present discussion:

> And I turned[94] and I saw all the oppression which is done under the sun. And behold, the tear[s] of the oppressed, and they do not have a comforter, and from the hand of their oppressors [comes][95] power, and they do not have a comforter. And I congratulated[96] the dead, who already died, over those still living. And more[97] than the two of them [I praised][98] the one who has not been yet, who has not seen the evil deed that is done[99] under the sun. [Qoh 4:1-3]

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context much better. The 3ms sfx is of no consequence because it does not refer to any particular noun, but is purely adverbial, cf. יַחְדָּו (Gordis 1955a:228). For such an adverbial use of אַחֲרָיו elsewhere in the book see Qoh 9:3 (note 112 on p. 162).

[93] For textual notes see p. 202.

[94] I am inclined to agree with Fox (1989:201), that the verb is not used here idiomatically, since this is Qoheleth's first observation of oppression. If it was to modify ראה alone in the sense *I had yet another look at the world and saw* יסף and not שׁוּב would be expected (for the distinction between the two verbs see Joü § 177b). This reading is in harmony with 𝔐 accents.

[95] Gordis (1955a:228) suggests that וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ is a nominal expression parallel to דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים and following the וְהִנֵּה. However, the conjunctions indicate in my view that וְהִנֵּה is part of the first clause, with וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ being parallel to וְהִנֵּה דִּמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים. Fox (1989:201) emends to וּבְיַד, but there is not textual support for such emendation and it is not necessary to make sense of the text.

[96] 𝔐 infa. abs., 𝔊 has an aorist which could indicate Sx, but not necessarily. Infa. with וְ is used in LBH to continue the preceding finite verb (see WOC 35.5.2b). This is in our case וְשַׁבְתִּי in Qoh 4:1, and therefore, the infa. is naturally rendered into Greek by aorist.

[97] Lit. *better*.

> If a man begets a hundred [children] and lives many years, and as many as the days of his years may be, but his soul would not be satiate from the goods, and he[100] even did not have[101] a burial, I say: 'the miscarried one is better off than him'. For in futility he came and in darkness he will go[102] and in darkness his name is covered. He did not see the sun either and did not get to know [anything], there is more rest[103] to this one than the other. Even if[104] he lives a thousand years twice, but does not enjoy himself, do not they both go to the same place? [Qoh 6:3-6]

Here Qoheleth touches on the question of the nature of the existence of the unborn. It is probably necessary to make a distinction between the two passages. In the second text Qoheleth is concerned with a miscarried baby, i.e., someone who bypasses the world *under the sun*. The former text would, on the other hand, seem to be talking not about a person in a prenatal stage, but simply one that has not come into being at all. It would appear from both texts, especially in the light of Qoheleth's insistence that the traffic between the world of the living and Sheol goes entirely one-way, that Qoheleth envisaged yet a fourth realm from which human beings come into the world *under the sun*.[105]

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[98] The אֵת indicates that *those who have not been yet* is the object of the verb from the previous verse, *pace* Gordis (1955a:229) who sees here nominative absolute, on the grounds that the verb would be too distant from the object. However, a dozen words hardly creates a distance that would interrupt the flow of thought.

[99] Gordis (1955a:229) prefers to read ptc with 𝔊, I am inclined to understand the Sx in a gnomic sense.

[100] Crenshaw (1988:120) takes this as a reference to the miscarried child. However, the miscarried child is not introduced until the very end of the verse, and the 3ms sfx is used throughout the verse to refer only to the unfortunate man (consider מִמֶּנּוּ which comes *after* the sfx in question). This makes Crenshaw's interpretation unlikely. The above rendering finds further support in the accentuation.

[101] Gordis (1955a:249) asserts that the text as it stands does not make sense, and reads לוּא הִיתָה, in the sense *even if he has a proper burial*. However, there are a number of objections against this reading. (1) Gordis has to assume that the particle לוּא is used incorrectly, because for his interpretation the condition must be real; (2) the particle would be superfluous for a real condition, fulfilling identical functions as the already present וְגַם; (3) the particle לוּא would stand at the beginning and not between the subject and predicate. Gordis fails to appreciate that the conjunction *and* does not have to be taken in a strictly Boolean sense, i.e., the clause as it stands does not necessarily imply that failure to be satiate in life could somehow be compensated for by a proper burial. Rather, Qoheleth, in his typical style, pictures a man at the extreme, who is both not satiate *and* does not get a proper burial.

[102] Following L יֵלֵךְ; 4QQoh[a] הלך.

[103] Reading with L נָחַת; 4QQoh[a] נוחת. Gordis (1955a:249) renders *satisfaction* because he considers the statement *there is more rest* to be self-evident. However, satisfaction requires self-consciousness, and it is precisely the point Qoheleth is making that the miscarried child has no consciousness at all.

[104] Reading with 𝔐 אֲלֹוּ; 4QQoh[a] ואם לוא.

[105] It is possible that we meet here the later rabbinic notion of גּוּף in an incipient form.

The World of the Living

While Qoheleth offers us some insights into the different segments of the larger cosmos, he is mainly concerned with the sphere of the living, which he typically designates as the *under the sun* (or *under the heavens*). Qoheleth never speaks explicitly of the origins of the world in a manner similar to Prov 8:22ff., yet, it is implied clearly enough that the world was created by God [e.g. Qoh 7:13; 12:1, 7]. There are two passages in the book that have special bearing on our understanding of Qoheleth's cosmological perspective, and it is these that I will concentrate on next.

The first of these is the opening poem [Qoh 1:4-11]. This text, wedged between the opening inclusio and the Solomonic experiment, can easily be dismissed as being of little real significance. Yet, it is not some unnecessary embellishment, but rather the whole of Qoheleth's reasoning stems from the outline of the cosmos that this poem contains. The poem follows immediately after the programmatic question of Qoh 1:3 *what profit is there for man in all his labour which he carries out under the sun*, which I have dealt with in chapter 1, and it is the beginning of Qoheleth's reply to this question:

> A generation[106] is going, and a generation is coming, but the earth[107] stands for ever.
>
> The sun is rising[108] and the sun is setting, panting to its place, there it is rising [again]. Going to the South, going to the North, circling, circling,[109] the wind[110] is going, and the wind [keeps] returning on its circular path.[111]
>
> All the rivers are going to the sea, and the sea is [never] filled up. To the place where the rivers are going, there they are going again.[112] All the things[113] are

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[106] Ogden (1986) proposed that דּוֹר here refers not to human generations, but to the cycles of nature; this has been convincingly refuted by Fox (1988b).

[107] Fox (1988b) proposed that אֶרֶץ here refers to humanity as a whole. While Qoheleth quite clearly envisages humanity as going on perpetually, I am inclined to think that אֶרֶץ refers here to the earth, as a stage not only for the movement of the generations but also as a reference point for the activity of the other natural phenomena.

[108] Reading זוֹרֵחַ instead of זָרַח in the light of the string of ptcs in vv. 4 -6.

[109] The repeated סֹבֵב should be retained, note the 2+2+2+2 beat up to the *zāqēp qāṭōn*.

[110] The gender disagreement of the preceding participles with רוּחַ is most likely due to the fact that the noun follows the opening verbs at a significant distance, and thus the text uses the generic unmarked form which is retained once the subject has been stated. Such syntax is found several times in the book [e.g. Qoh 7:7, 24] and elsewhere in the OT [e.g. 1 Kgs 19:11].

[111] The final part after the *zāqēp qāṭōn* should be retained - the basic notion in the poem is that of circularity, and this part closes the circle.

> wearisome[114] — one is not able to describe [them]. The eye will not [ever][115] be satisfied by watching, nor will the ear be [ever] filled from[116] hearing.
>
> Whatever has been, is that which will be, and that which has happened[117] [already] is that which will happen. And there is nothing new under the sun. Is there[118] such a thing about which one could say: 'Look at this! this is new!'? It already has been during the ages which were[119] before us.
>
> There is no remembrance[120] of the previous [generations],[121] and also concerning the later [generations] who will be, there will be no remembrance of them with those who will be afterwards. [Qoh 1:4-11]

I have adopted a formal division of the text suggested by Rousseau (1981), who argued that the poem consists of three two-verse stanzas framed within an opening bi-colon and a closing tri-colon (see Appendix B). It can be observed that the first

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[112] Here I am inclined to side with those commentators who argue that שָׁם הֵם שָׁבִים לָלֶכֶת in 7B should be translated *there they are returning to go*, since, as Whybray (1988) pointed out, the idiomatic use of שׁוּב in the sense *to do something again* is employed in reference to repeated activities separated by a lapse of time, not to a single continuous activity and thus the phrase cannot be very well rendered *there they continue to go*. Continuity, I think, would more likely be expressed by the idiomatic use of יסף.

[113] Fox (1989:171) argues for the sense *words*, because דָּבָר is never used in reference to material things. However, here the reference is not to the four material objects, but to phenomena associated with these, and דָּבָר is regularly used of action or activity (e.g. Exod 9:6; 2 Sam 11:11). Loader also (1986:21) prefers to render דְּבָרִים as *words*, because of the later reference to hearing and speaking, and interprets this verse as an attack on traditional wisdom. However, since the reference is not only to hearing but also to seeing, it does appear that הַדְּבָרִים does not refer to words, but to the observable phenomena.

[114] The context, with its reference to human failure, strongly favours the rendering proposed here against a more passive sense, i.e., *all things are weary* (*pace* Barton 1908:74-75; Delitzsch 1986:223); the phenomena described are characterised by constancy, not weariness, thus the passive sense is wholly inappropriate here (*pace* Gordis 1955a:197 who allows the passive sense as secondary). Similarly Ogden's (1987b:32) understanding that *toiling toward a goal* is denoted here is precluded by the circular, i.e., goal-less nature of the phenomena in question; similarly Whybray's (1988) understanding that the word denotes not weariness but purposeful activity fits ill with the context in which nothing at all is achieved in spite of the continuous activity.

[115] Note the shift from the participles of the preceding verses to the prefix conjugation.

[116] Gordis (1955a:197) observes that מלא normally takes a direct object without preposition. However, it should be noted that in this case *hearing* is not the substance of the filling, but rather the process, the instrument. Consequently, a simple accusative would not be appropriate here.

[117] I agree with Fox (1989:173) that this is the sense in which Qoheleth uses the Niphal of עשׂה (cf. Exod 2:4).

[118] The B colon requires this to be interpreted as a question. Gordis (1955a:197) suggested that this is a protasis of a conditional sentence, but against that view speaks the lack of any formal co-ordination between the two colons.

[119] Reading pl. with some Hebrew manuscripts.

[120] זִכְרוֹן is vocalised as a construct, a phenomena found in later Hebrew often before לְ (Gordis 1955a:198).

[121] In the context the other possible referent are the ages from v. 10; however, this verse refers to three successive cycles, and since remembering associated with the final cycle is a function of a human mind it is clear that the ultimate referent is personal (Gordis 1955a:198 pointed out that an impersonal referent would most likely have used a feminine form).

two stanzas are made of two successive statements resembling each other. In the first stanza we have a description of two natural phenomena, sun and wind. A basic macroscopic pattern of behaviour is suggested for each, followed by a further detailed description of the nature of that movement and concluded by a statement implying that the whole behaviour is repetitive. The two statements can be schematised as follows:

sun: rising + setting; panting; cyclic repetition
wind: southward movement + northward movement; spinning; cyclic repetition

In the second stanza we find an observation concerning the character of the movement of water and of the nature of all things from the perspective of a human observer. Again, both of these statements have a similar structure: a claim is made about the basic nature of the phenomenon, followed by a description of a result that is produced, in both cases in terms of a failure, followed by a reason for the failure:

rivers: going to the sea ⇨ *fail* to overfill the sea; *because* they return to the starting point
all things: wearisome ⇨ *impossible* to describe; *because* of endless flow of information

In the third stanza the pattern changes. The arrangement here is chiastic. The stanza opens and closes with a declaration that everything repeats itself, between which we find two statements that there is nothing new:

past = future, past = future
nothing new; nothing new
present = past

The initial bicolon and the closing tricolon form a frame for the three stanzas, that indicates Qoheleth's real interest. Verse 4 represents the main topic, the movement of the generations with the seeming stability of the earth as its reference point. Having introduced the key issue, the replacement of one generation by another,[122] Qoheleth seeks better understanding of the character of this passing

[122] A note is due on the sequence in v. 4. It would seem more natural to have *generation comes and generation goes* instead of Qoheleth's *generation goes and generation comes*. However, the order which Qoheleth uses is significant as it shows that his concern is with the succession of generations. The suggested *generation comes and generation goes* would picture only one generation, which would do both the coming and leaving while the statement *generation goes and generation comes*

Continued on the following page

movement by drawing a parallel with other observable phenomena, namely the sun, wind and water. The conclusion of his observation of these phenomena is then applied to the relationship between the individual generations. Human existence is subject to the same pattern of behaviour as these natural phenomena. That which is true of any particular generation is also true of any other generation, i.e., in a certain sense the movement of generations is cyclic.

As the movement of generations is obviously happening along a temporal rather than spatial trajectory, it is justified to speak of Qoheleth's particular concept of time. It is difficult to picture it in graphic terms. It is composed of at least two distinct movements, one which is cyclic and one which is linear. The linear element accounts for the replacement of one generation by another. The cyclic part is more complex. On one level the cycle pertains to each generation, but there is still wider cyclicity which spans over a number of generations. Human experience is repetitive, although not every single generation encounters it in its entirety.

The prevailing temporal elements are the cyclic ones and it should be noted that the cyclic motion is not found just in the opening poem:

> Whatever has been, still is, and what [is] to be, already has been; and God chases the pursued.[123] [Qoh 3:15]

As a result of the cyclic nature, on the macroscopic level, Qoheleth's world is uniform, unchanging and, therefore, predictable. Human experience has universal validity, and thus Qoheleth's own experience can be used to draw more general and widely applicable conclusions, i.e., Qoheleth is able to turn his experience into a paradigm that describes the way in which the world is. However, this is uniformity is of an entirely different type than that of the proverbial world; *macroscopic* is the key

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pictures two generations, coming in succession. (That this order is not accidental is shown by the same organisation of v. 11.)

[123] When בקשׁ is found in the OT together with רדף it is always in the sense *to pursue* [Josh 2:22; Judg 4:22; 1 Sam 23:25; 25:29; 26:20]. I follow here Ibn Ezra's understanding that *the pursued* here is the never ending time (see Rottzoll 1999:87-88). Ogden's (1987b:58) suggestion that vv. 14 and 15 are closely parallel and that in the light of the parallelism the sense of v. 15 is 'God requests that it be pursued,' *it* being either *enjoyment* or *the eternity*, finds no tangible support in the text (it is unlikely that אֶת־ is an abbreviated form of אֵת־אֲשֶׁר).

word here. The predictability of Qoheleth's world happens on an abstract phenomenal level, pertaining to issues such as birth and death, joy and sorrow. The predictability does not extend to the lower detailed level of specific human actions and their consequences. The regularity stems from the fact that there is no real progress in time. The only forward movement is limited to the exchange of the generations on the surface of the earth, while the principal nature of human existence and experience does not change.

Alongside its cyclic nature, Qoheleth's world has a further important characteristic. There is no persistent link between the individual generational cycles. They are connected by human memory, which has got only a limited reach, and may not be able to encompass the entirety of the supra-generational cycle. It is, therefore, possible to gain the impression that the world is progressing and new things are taking place. This, Qoheleth argues, is merely an illusion. Further, the lack of a persistent inter-generational link means that any human achievement is of passing nature, and is bound eventually to disappear from human memory. This is of great significance for Qoheleth's enquiry, because it means that to answer the question of persistent and absolute יִתְרוֹן, he only needs to scrutinise what can be achieved within a single-generation cycle of time; if a particular human activity cannot produce lasting benefit within the individual's life span, even less can it do so as new generations come and go.

So far, I have argued that Qoheleth's world is principally cyclic and thus essentially predictable. The precise nature of this predictability is explained by Qoheleth in the famous poem on time, which I wish to concentrate on now. This poem has some intriguing characteristics. It contains three quarters of the occurrences of the word עֵת found in the book, but its even more striking feature is the carefully worked out formal structure. We find in the poem three stanzas placed within a frame. Within each of the stanzas as well as within the opening bicolon of the closing section, we find a careful antithetical parallelism — the time of birth is juxtaposed with the time of death, the time of planting with time of uprooting, etc. At

the same time the sequence positive/negative in the two halves of each stanza is reversed, creating a semantic chiasm. The intricacy of the arrangement goes even further, as there is a mutual chiastic arrangement between the neighbouring stanzas (see Appendix A).[124]

It is not my intention to go into a detailed discussion of the significance of the individual lines of this poem. Some seem self-explanatory, some have puzzled commentators for two millennia. For the present purposes, the most crucial is the significance of the word עֵת as it is used here. I will start with some general comments on its semantics in the OT. עֵת is the basic OT word denoting a *specific* time, referring either to a point [e.g. Deut 1:9] or an interval [e.g. Deut 3:8] on the time continuum. Significantly, עֵת *per se* is temporarily non-specific; its basic value is similar to the English *sometime*. In order to denote more specific temporal information, עֵת must be further qualified, and this can be done in two distinct ways. First, עֵת can be qualified by some temporally specific expression, and the whole phrase then refers to an absolute time. An example of this use can be found in phrases such as the very common לְעֵת עֶרֶב [e.g. Gn 8:11]. Second, עֵת can be qualified by a non-temporal circumstantial expression. The whole phrase then can be translated to a fixed point on the temporal axis when the specific circumstances occur, but this can only be done with hindsight. The expression itself does not carry temporal information; the time it denotes is relative. This is the case, for instance, in the phrase בְּעֵת צָרָה [e.g. Is 33:2].

Returning to the time poem, it is tempting to read it as a statement of temporal determinism of existence. Everything has been pre-set in time and it will occur at the point on the temporal continuum that has been allocated to it.[125] The opening line of the first stanza: *there is a time to give birth and there is a time to die*, quite clearly lends itself to such a reading. However, such an understanding

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[124] For a detailed examination of the formal characteristics of the poem see in particular Loader (1969;1979:11-14, 29-33).

[125] Thus von Rad (1972:263) speaks of 'the time and the hour which are set for all human projects'.

encounters a number of difficulties. To start with, it is in ill harmony with the role the text plays within the larger structure of the book. The poem serves as an eloquent answer to the programmatic question of Qoh 1:3, as is indicated by its restatement in Qoh 3:9. It follows directly after the basic investigation into life which Qoheleth, alias Solomon, undertook in chapters 1-2, and contains the essence of Qoheleth's explanation why the Solomonic experiment failed. Since the mode of operation of this experiment implies free decision-making [Qoh 2:10], and since the Solomonic experiment did not fail because Qoheleth, alias Solomon, was not able to do what he pleased, it is unlikely that the explanation is to be found in the conviction that the world is predestined in a rigid temporal fashion. Further, if the explanation for the failure is such a strict temporal determinism of existence, then this would be a natural place to end the book. It is hard to accept that Qoheleth believed in a strict temporal predestination and at the same time to account for the almost 50 command forms that are located after the time poem,[126] at least some of which are clearly intended as genuine guidelines for making the most of life.

However, by far the most significant objection to reading the poem as a declaration of temporal predestination is the fact that Qoheleth makes a statement that shows explicitly that he does not consider one's death to be fixed in time. He advises the reader *do not be too wicked and do not be a fool, why should you die when it is not your time?* [Qoh 7:17] Quite clearly the time of death is the function of circumstances here. While it cannot be avoided (there is some limiting natural time of death, one's time), it can be speeded up by one's course of action. Time to die is then not an absolute point on the temporal continuum, but rather a set of circumstances, natural or unnatural, resulting in death. This precludes Qoh 3:2 being a statement about a fixed temporal predetermination of a person's death; in the expression עֵת לָמוּת it is not עֵת that qualifies לָמוּת but rather לָמוּת that is the circumstantial qualifier of עֵת.

[126] As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of command forms and direct address to the reader in the book are located after the poem, in chapters 7-12.

Circumstantial understanding of עֵת required in Qoh 3:2 not only makes good sense throughout the poem, but is clearly preferable in some of the verses. Thus, there are certain circumstances which are required for successful planting, and certain circumstances that lead to uprooting of plants.[127] When considered on its own it is very unlikely that one would wish to interpret this line as a statement of fatalism. The same is true in respect of time of weeping and time of laughing in Qoh 3:4A, or even more so, speaking and being silent in Qoh 3:7B, which is most naturally understood as a time when it is, or is not, *appropriate* to speak, not a time when it is or is not *possible* to speak.

The looser circumstantial understanding of עֵת in the poem also makes very good sense of the so carefully worked out polarity and the comments that follow it. God designed the world in such a way that for every set of circumstances which lead to some positive outcome, there is a corresponding set of circumstances with a negative outcome and the negative and positive are in balance, maintaining an equilibrium which is neither positive nor negative, but simply neutral, or, in Qoheleth's own vocabulary, הֶבֶל. Qoheleth's concern in this poem is not *when* things happen but *that* they happen, and that they happen in mutually annulling pairs.

The system Qoheleth pictures is not self-maintaining in a deist sense. Rather, God is involved and is in full control. He works out everything 'beautifully' in its time, i.e., it is God who makes certain that eventually everything is brought into perfect balance, that within the *under the sun* sphere no event will be left without its counterpart. His ultimate control over the whole system and the inability of human beings to cheat it, clearly implied by Qoheleth, is based on two things. First is the fact that God imposed limitations on human abilities, and neither speed, nor strength, nor wisdom can guarantee success, but time and chance happen to all, and no-one is able to know one's time [Qoh 9:11-12]. The second factor responsible for human

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[127] I disagree with Loader (1979:30) that the reference in 2B is to planting and weeding. The parallelism between 2A and 2B and the pass. ptc. נָטוּעַ suggest the object affected is identical in 2Ba and 2Bb.

inability to overcome the equilibrious nature of the world is the reality of death. Death functions as a wild card that can be played at any time and always results in neutrality. In order for death to function this way, its value must be ambiguous, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. This is precisely what we find in Qoheleth. Sometimes death cancels one's earthly achievements [Qoh 5:13], and thus thwarts any seeming positive bias of the world; on other occasions death brings redemption from a thoroughly negative experience of life [Qoh 4:2]. (Similarly also birth, the counterpart of death from the time poem, can be perceived not only positively but also as a negative event [Qoh 6:3].)[128]

The fact that no genuine profit can be turned over in the world is considered by Qoheleth as a intentional feature of the design of the *under the sun*. Qoheleth touches on this issue early on,

> I saw all the deeds that are done under heaven, and behold, all this is futile and striving after wind. What is crooked, cannot be straightened, and a deficit cannot be counted. [Qoh 1:14-15][129]

but it is only later on that the full significance of the statement becomes apparent:

> See the deed of God, for who is able to straighten that which he made crooked? On a good day, enjoy [it]![130] And on a bad day, consider: also this alongside that God did, so that man may find nothing to complain against him.[131] [Qoh 7:13-14]

The world of Qoheleth's experience is one where the positive and enjoyable is always accompanied by the negative and unpleasant, and it is precisely because God wished it to be so. In Qoheleth's understanding, God is ultimately responsible for everything. For him everything that happens is linked to God, and both the positive and negative experience of human life is a part of the intentional design. Qoheleth is even prepared to go as far as to suggest that God is responsible for evil perpetrated

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[128] For an extensive examination of Qoheleth's view of death against the background of attitudes found in the ANE see Burkes (1999).

[129] For textual notes see p. 161.

[130] 𝔐 הֱיֵה, *be (in good)!*; 𝔊, α', θ' חֱיֵה, *live (in good)!*

[131] This is an idiomatic use of אַחֲרָיו; see 𝔗, σ', 𝔖 and the rabbinic interpretation. Driver (1954:230) points out loosely related Aramaic and Syriac idioms. Delitzsch (323) suggests *after his death*, in the sense that man gets the full experience in life, both good and bad, but that is unlikely concerning Qoheleth's reluctance to consider what happens after death.

by humans, at least to a degree [Qoh 8:11ff.[132]]. Yet, Qoheleth does not condemn God, but equally there is not a hint of dualism in the book that would allow the responsibility to be passed onto someone else. One can sense in Qoheleth an echo of the Isaianic 'does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?"' [Is 45:9 NIV].

However, the pairing of events outlined by the time poem is not strictly synchronised, death does not necessarily coincide with birth, nor does joy turn immediately into sorrow on every occasion. This temporal discrepancy is a critical part of Qoheleth's perception of the world, for it leaves some paradoxical hope; life may not produce anything of real value, but it can still be worth living. It is from here that Qoheleth's positive attitude toward life and his calls for enjoyment originate, and the whole of Qoheleth's wisdom is built around this feature of the design of the world, as we will see in chapter 5.

Cosmology and Theology of the Epilogue

Finally, before we leave Qoheleth, a few words are necessary with reference to the epilogue. It is not possible to reconstruct the whole of the epilogist's cosmological and theological perspective from the few verses, but a few observations with respect to his concept of God are possible. In contrast to Qoheleth's understanding, and similarly to Proverbs, the epilogist's God is prepared to reveal to humans what he demands of them. Further, the exhortation to obey divine commandments, in spite of the obscurity of the final phrase of the epilogue, does betray God pictured as a judge, and certainly involved in the human world much more directly than we find in Qoheleth proper. In the light of this emphatic exhortation it is unlikely that the epilogist would affirm Qoheleth's conviction that the righteous and wicked have the same chances to succeed in life; it is only those who obey God that prosper. In this respect the epilogist would seem much closer to the proverbial point of view, but it is necessary to keep in mind that these two

[132] See p. 118.

perspectives have been arrived at differently. As pointed out earlier, the epilogist's understanding is based on knowledge of specific divine commandments, i.e., verbal revelation, and thus is by necessity originating within the cult.[133]

Summary

Again, there are some significant similarities in the cosmological and theological perspectives of the two books. In both, the world of the living is entirely separate from the divine sphere and the realm of the dead and humanity does not have free access to either of these two. Neither of the books reflects adherence to a belief in a meaningful afterlife; the concern of both Proverbs and Qoheleth is with earthly existence. As far as the world of the living is concerned, it is considered orderly and predictable so as to allow a formulation of a paradigm that describes its behaviour. Yet, the orderliness is of a different kind. In Proverbs a fairly stable link between a person's behaviour and its consequences is maintained by a just God, and it is possible to exploit this link in order to achieve a significant degree of progress in life. In contrast, for Qoheleth the uniformity of the world lies on a more abstract, phenomenal level and guarantees that no real progress can be achieved during a human lifetime, nor outside of it.

The cosmological perspective is closely linked to the overall image of God in the two books. While both of the main voices think in terms of one God with a universal sphere of influence, not limited to any single territory, in Proverbs God is much more open toward humanity. He is likened to a father figure, he wishes to be known, and he reveals himself abundantly to those who seek to understand the world with the right motives. Qoheleth's God is much more remote, closely guarding his unique position by limiting what human beings can know. Further, in the semi-dualistic outlook of Proverbs, God is essentially disassociated from evil. It stems

[133] The link between the epilogue and the cult was noted by others, e.g., Dell (1994b:311-13) concluded that the epilogue's function is to establish a link between wisdom and Torah.

from the forces of chaos the origin of which is silently passed over. In stark contrast, no such dualism is found in Qoheleth. For him God is ultimately responsible for everything, and humanity has no other choice but to live in the framework that God set up for it. The epilogist is closer in his perspective to the proverbial sages, but only to the extent that his God is directly involved in human world, while at the same time his theological perspective is centred around the cult.

Chapter 4

THE HUMAN WORLD

In the previous chapter I pointed out that the wisdom undertaking, as we find it in both Proverbs and Qoheleth, is an earthly exercise with earthly concerns. This statement can be further qualified: the wisdom enterprise is not only earthly, but it is anthropocentric in its aims. Its goal is not simply to understand the world *per se*, but rather to understand the place of a human being in the cosmos. Ultimately, the sages wished to understand the world in order to improve the quality of their existence. Therefore, an attempt to formulate the sages' worldview cannot be made without close examination of their anthropological perspective, their social views and the socio-economic structures reflected in the two books.[1]

[1] I must clarify that I do not wish to imply here that wisdom is, as it is sometimes claimed, solely or predominantly anthropocentric in its entirety, i.e., that it is concerned only with questions of human nature and activity. I fully agree with Perdue (1994:46-48) that in order to do justice to wisdom, it is not possible to consider it merely as an attempt to understand humanity, nor is it possible to relegate wisdom entirely to the sphere of cosmological deliberation. Rather, both of these elements are key aspects of the wisdom quest. Wisdom is about understanding the whole world for the sake of, and with special emphasis on, humanity; it is about human players on the cosmic stage. Thus, its concerns are anthropocentric, but these concerns are addressed in a wider cosmological context.

The Human World of Proverbs

Proverbial Anthropology

I will start the examination of the book with the elementary question 'what is a human being' from the proverbial perspective. While I have suggested in chapter 2 that the sages had a fairly homogenous view of the world in which human beings could learn from other creatures, there is evidence in the book that humans occupy a special place in the created world of the sages. Humanity is, for instance, singled out from the whole earth as Dame Wisdom's source of pleasure [Prov 8:31]. In fact, in a couple of places it becomes apparent that the sages had a high anthropology, somewhat resembling the *imago dei* perspective of Genesis:

> He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, he who shows grace to the underprivileged respects him. [Prov 14:31]
>
> He who derides a poor person scorns his maker, he who rejoices over disaster[2] will not go unpunished. [Prov 17:5]
>
> A rich man and a poor man share this:[3] Yahweh made both of them. [Prov 22:2]
>
> A poor man and an oppressor share this:[3] Yahweh gives light to the eyes of both of them. [Prov 29:13]

There appears to be an apologetic concern in the background of these verses, with the intention to refute an implied claim that the poor can be freely oppressed, because the socio-economic divide is evidence that such oppression is permissible, and most likely, that it is a right that the rich are divinely granted. It is in this context that the theologically-based argument of the previous verses makes best sense; the sages argue that all human beings, irrespective of their social standing, are due a certain dignity because they all have the same maker.[4] This is not to say that Proverbs principally rejects any social arrangement that is hierarchical, nor that the sages considered poverty and wealth as arbitrary states outside of a person's control. On

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[2] 𝔐 לְאֵיד; 𝔊 ἀπολλυμένῳ on the grounds of which Oesterley (139) proposes to read לְאֹבֵד, but the difference is not necessarily due to a difference in the Vorlage. Driver (1951:182) reads here a ptc of a hypothetical verb *אוד *to be burdensome, to be burdened*, pointing out that several manuscripts have אָד. None of these make any significant impact on the meaning of the text.

[3] Lit. *meet*.

[4] As I have argued in the previous chapter, the proverbial view is void of any notion of human immortality; the high anthropology is purely earthly.

the contrary, poverty is most frequently portrayed as self-inflicted and riches the product of wisdom. The quoted verses are not intended as a critique of the existing social arrangement, only of using it as a justification for behaviour otherwise considered unacceptable; that which is unacceptable with respect to the rich is also unacceptable with respect to the poor.

A human being, as envisaged in Proverbs, could be called *homo docilis*: when humanity was created by God, it was endowed by him with certain abilities such as those exemplified in the following proverb:

> Hearing ear and seeing eye, Yahweh made both of them. [Prov 20:12]

This has two main implications. First, human senses are God-given and should, therefore, be cultivated and used in coming to grips with the larger created world. God equipped people to observe, to learn and so gain knowledge and skills; it is, therefore, wrong not to employ these faculties. Yet, an additional and more cautious tone can be detected in the proverb. Since these senses were created by God, their perception lies within the sphere of divine control and nothing can be acquired by them that would be hidden from God himself; the sage who acquires wisdom using his God-given senses should not think that such wisdom can make God dispensable. This perspective is explicitly expressed elsewhere in the book:

> A man's mind plans his ways, but Yahweh establishes his step. [Prov 16:9]
>
> A person's steps are from Yahweh, but a man, how can he understand[5] his way? [Prov 20:24]
>
> There is a path that [seems] straight to man, but at its end are paths of death. [Prov 14:12]
>
> All the ways of a man are pure in his eyes, but Yahweh tests spirits. [Prov 16:2]

Apart from the aforementioned implication that proverbial wisdom can never threaten the sovereignty of Yahweh, an additional notion can be seen in these verses: there are general limits to what human senses can ascertain, not necessarily linked to direct divine intervention. Consequently, the wise person is never entirely self-

[5] 𝔐 יָבִין; 𝔖 ܩܝܡ, *establishes*, i.e., reading כּוּן. Both readings make good sense, and either could be a result of a small scribal error. The impact on meaning is only marginal.

reliant. The sage knows that people are under the thorough scrutiny of God, their destiny is firmly in divine hands and their abilities have inherent limits. It is from this basic anthropological perspective that the *fear of Yahweh* emerges as the cornerstone of proverbial wisdom:

> Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding, Know him in all your ways, and he will straighten your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes — fear Yahweh and turn away from evil. [Prov 3:5-7]

Yet, in spite of the acknowledgement that there are limits to human ability to be in control, Proverbs in general is rather optimistic about human potential. Within the world subjected to divine order, humans can, and should, use their skills; only then can they achieve satisfaction and prosperity. The life of the *homo docilis* is understood in linear terms as progressing forward. Wisdom and righteousness promote advancement and facilitate one's success; folly hinders progress in life and leads to failure and loss. This sense of progress is best seen in the sayings which employ the imagery of a path, such as the following:

> The righteousness of a blameless person straightens their way, but the wicked will fall on the account of his wickedness. [Prov 11:5]
>
> The way of the sluggard is like a hedge[6] of nightshade,[7] but the path of the upright ones[8] is a highway. [Prov 15:19]

The positive view of human abilities is not to be confused with a conviction that humans are principally good. The inborn human tendency in Proverbs is toward folly and evil:

> There is wickedness tied to the heart of a boy, the disciplining rod will drive it away from him. [Prov 22:15]
>
> Who can say: 'I have cleansed my heart, I have purified [myself] from my sin!'? [Prov 20:9]

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[6] 𝔐 כִּמְשֻׂכַת; 𝔊 ἐστρωμέναι, *are paved*, possibly reading מְשֻׂכֶכֶת, *woven together*, although it is equally possible that the translator was not familiar with the Hebrew word and interpolated from the context.

[7] Probably *Solanum coagulans, Solanum incanum,* Jericho potato. Grows to up to 1m and is thorny (Hepper 1992:55).

[8] 𝔐 יְשָׁרִים; 𝔊 τῶν ἀνδρείων, possibly reading חָרוּצִים, but more likely an attempt to improve the parallelism.

> Many a man declares[9] his loyalty,[10] but a trustworthy man who shall find? [Prov 20:6]

This, though, is not to be understood as a doctrine of total depravity of human nature, for the sages passionately believed, as the initial quoted verse indicates, that the natural tendency can be overcome if sufficient effort is made. The means by which this is accomplished is wisdom. Wisdom is not something that comes naturally, rather, wisdom is gained through discipline and hard work; only folly comes easily and without effort. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that the sages despised laziness and that they derided the sluggard, as in the following joke:

> The sluggard buries his hand in the pot, yet, he does not carry it back to his mouth. [Prov 19:24]

The natural human tendency toward folly is also reflected in the fact that the majority of the human qualities mentioned in Proverbs are negative, ones to be overcome. The most important of these is probably short-temper:

> Do not associate with an angry person, and do not walk with a short tempered man, lest you learn his ways and get yourself a trap for your own life. [Prov 22:24-25]
>
> An angry man gets engaged in strife, but a patient person appeases dispute. [Prov 15:18]
>
> An angry man stirs up strife, and an irritable man multiplies transgression. [Prov 29:22]

The basic shortcoming of irritability that makes it so unpalatable to the proverbial sages is the spiralling out of control of events in the life of an anger-driven person; such a life descends into chaos. In contrast, a proper life is one that shows orderliness, for it is order from which success stems.

Self-control is a prime characteristic of a wise person and the admonishment to exercise it is not limited to anger-management, but applies to other human

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[9] 𝔐 יִקְרָא, 𝔖 ܟܬܝܪ ܒܪܝܢ ܢܩܪܐ ܠܗ, *many humans are called ...*, possibly reading Niphal. 𝔊 τίμιον, i.e., יָקָר, which is beyond doubt due to a scribal error.

[10] Lit. *man of his loyalty*. If 𝔐 vocalisation of the verbs is retained the sfx could be also interpreted as referring to the subject, i.e., *many a man summons a person whom he trusts*, but the sense above is in my opinion preferable (cf. Toy 384).

dispositions. The sages observed that human appetite is limitless and held the opinion that excess devalues experience and thus deprives a person of possible satisfaction:

> Sheol and Abaddon are never sated, and human eyes are never sated. [Prov 27:20]
>
> [When] you find honey, eat what is sufficient for you, lest you overeat and vomit it. [Prov 25:16]
>
> A sated appetite treads down the honey comb, as for a hungry soul, any bitterness is sweet. [Prov 27:7]

Another emotion that the sages observed and commented on, and which they considered particularly powerful, is jealousy:

> Anger is cruel and rage is a flood, but who can withstand jealousy? [Prov 27:4]
>
> He who commits adultery with a woman lacks sense, he who does so, is destroying his life. Beating and disgrace he will find, his dishonour will not be wiped out. Since jealousy [drives] a husband's anger, he will not have compassion in the day of revenge. He will not accept any satisfaction and will not consent no matter how big the gift. [Prov 6:32-35][11]

These comments on particular emotions, such as anger or jealousy, are only an element of a much deeper psychological insight. The sages believed that the emotional and mental part of human existence, largely hidden from the outsiders, is of the utmost importance:

> The heart knows the bitterness of its soul, and a stranger[12] cannot share in its joy. [Prov 14:10]
>
> Anxiety in the mind of a man bows him down, but good news makes him happy. [Prov 12:25]
>
> A deferred expectation makes the mind sick, but a fulfilled desire is a tree of life. [Prov 13:12]
>
> A rejoicing heart cheers up the face, when the heart aches, the spirit is stricken. [Prov 15:13]
>
> A joyful mind makes the body to be well,[13] but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. [Prov 17:22]
>
> A healthy[14] mind is the life of the body, but envy[15] is rot of the bones. [Prov 14:30]

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[11] For textual notes see p. 194.

[12] 𝔐 זָר; 𝔊 ὕβρει, i.e., זָד; 𝔐 is superior in the light of the parallelism.

[13] Reading with 𝔖 ܦܓܪܐ, *the body*, i.e., גְּוִיָּה. 𝔐 גֵּהָה, *medicine*, but both the parallelism and the syntax (the Hiphil requires an object) support 𝔖 (*pace* McKane 1970:506).

[14] The key issue is whether מַרְפֵּא should be derived from רפה, and have the sense *tranquil mind*, or from רפא, *mind of healing*. In either case, it is the state/attitude of the mind that impacts physical well-being.

> A man's spirit upholds[16] [him in] his infirmity,[17] but who can lift up a crushed spirit? [Prov 18:14]
>
> All the days of a poor man are bad, but a sound mind[18] is a continuous feast. [Prov 15:15]

It is quite clear that the sages considered mental well-being as even more essential than physical health; mental strength was seen by them as essential to the ability to endure physical illness or hardship. These verses also indicate that the sages did not assume that the wise are spared all difficulties in life. Instead, they saw them as the testing stone of real mental strength:

> [If][19] you become disheartened in the day of trouble, your strength is small.[20] [Prov 24:10]

A small detour is necessary at this point. In the verses quoted previously inner well-being is often conveyed in terms of joy or happiness. Yet, it should be observed that joy *per se* is not the sages' aim; they differentiate clearly between what they consider proper and improper sources of joy. Thus, it is wrong and unwise to rejoice in someone else's misfortune [Prov 17:5; 24:17-18], enjoy doing what is evil [Prov 2:14], find joy in gluttony and drunkenness [Prov 20:1; 23:29-35], in adultery [Prov 5:1ff.], or folly in general [Prov 15:21]. Rather, one finds proper joy in doing what is right and just [Prov 21:15], in the knowledge and ability to advise others [Prov 15:23], in the relationship with one's wife [Prov 5:18], in one's offspring being properly brought up (i.e., wise) [Prov 10:1], in friendship, in being a peacemaker [Prov 12:20], but also in the luxury that comes with wisdom [Prov 27:9]. The sages further appreciated that joy can be easily thwarted, cannot obviate all pain and that sometimes the two co-exist:

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[15] Oesterley (115) argues that קִנְאָה should be rendered here *zeal*, however, the context implies negative sense.

[16] The verb יְכַלְכֵּל could be perceived both as having negative sense (*holds him in ...*) or positive sense (*upholds him*). Antithetical parallelism is in my view more probable here, since רוּחַ in the B colon only gains the negative sense from being qualified by נָכֵאָה, and no qualifier is present in the A colon.

[17] 𝔊 θυμὸν ἀνδρὸς πραΰνει θεράπων φρόνιμος, *an attendant of a sound mind soothes man's spirit*. This is unlikely due to a difference in the Vorlage, and more probably an interpolation by the translator. 𝔖 ܪܘܚܐ ܕܓܒܪܐ ܡܫܬܒܚ ܘܒܪܝܐ ܡܟܝܠ, *man's spirit endures his suffering*, reflects the same Hebrew as 𝔐.

[18] Hebrew טוֹב־לֵב, possibly *cheerful mind*.

[19] The conditional nature of this saying, albeit only implied, is unmistakable, cf. NIV.

[20] 𝔐 צַר, *narrow*, which is a play on צָרָה in the A colon.

> Even in laughter the heart does not stop aching,[21] and as for its end — joy is depressed.[22] [Prov 14:13]

The feeling of joy is, thus, better seen in Proverbs as an important by-product of wise living than its centre of gravity. Joy comes naturally to the wise, it is the trait of wise living. In contrast, excessive pursuit of pleasure leads to poverty:

> Who loves enjoyment [ends up] an impoverished man, who loves wine and oil will not become rich. [Prov 21:17].

Returning to the sages' psychological insights, it can be observed that their evaluation of people does not hinge on external appearances but on character; it is the inner person that is the real person in the proverbial perspective:

> As water reflects the face[23] so man's heart man. [Prov 27:19]

That which is visible on the surface is often misleading, covering an inner reality that can be significantly different:

> A gold ring in the nose of a pig is a beautiful woman turning aside from discernment. [Prov 11:22]
>
> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is a vanity, a woman who fears Yahweh,[24] she should be praised! [Prov 31:30]
>
> Man is desirable[25] for his loyalty, and a poor man is better than a liar. [Prov 19:22]
>
> Do not eat the bread[26] of a greedy man, and do not desire his delicacies … 'eat and drink', he says to you, but his mind/heart is not with you. As for your

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[21] Toy (239) prefers to render the Px as modal, i.e., *may be sad*; this is a possible rendering, but the parallel verbless clause in the B colon suggests a non-modal sense, such as the usual habitual one.

[22] Reading תּוּגָה, i.e., 3fs Niphal of יגה in place of 𝔐 תּוּגָה, *grief*. This reading is favoured by the parallelism which suggests construction of the type *adverbial modifier + verbal clause*. Even if the 𝔐 pointing is followed, שִׂמְחָה תּוּגָה has to be rendered as a nominal clause, for the accents, placing the secondary division after וְאַחֲרִיתָהּ, show that וְאַחֲרִיתָהּ is a *causus pendens*, and further, the construction *noun+sfx+noun* used to form genitive in Aramaic and later Hebrew is rarely used in BH.

[23] Lit. *as water face to face*; 𝔊(𝔖) ὥσπερ οὐχ ὅμοια πρόσωπα προσώποις, most likely an attempt to make sense of the text.

[24] 𝔐 יִרְאַת־יְהוָה where יִרְאַת should probably be understood as a fem. ptc. However, as the pointing stands, the text would need to be rendered *woman, fear of Yahweh*, i.e., the woman is equated with *fear of Yahweh*. This is exploited by McCreesh (1985) who argues that the woman is Wisdom. 𝔊 γυνὴ γὰρ συνετὴ εὐλογεῖται, φόβον δὲ κυρίου αὕτη αἰνείτω is not an exact rendering of 𝔐, but contrary to the claim that it read נְבוֹנָה in place of יִרְאַת־יְהוָה (e.g. Toy 549; Oesterley 287), the Greek text quite clearly attests *fear of Yahweh* as an attribute of the woman.

[25] 𝔐 תַּאֲוַת, i.e., *desire of*, supported by 𝔖 ܪ ܡܫܠ. In the light of the parallelism the genitive is best interpreted as objective. 𝔊 καρπὸς, תְּבוּאַת, probably a result of an audible error. McKane (1970:532) prefers 𝔊, rendering *man's productivity is his loyalty*, but the reading of 𝔐 and 𝔖 makes a better parallel to טוֹב מִן in the B colon.

> morsel, which you ate, you will vomit it, and you will destroy your pleasant words. [Prov 23:6-8]

The picture of the human being that emerges from these observations is that of a special creature which reflects its divine maker. It is a creature endowed with great potential, which, however, can only be unleashed when the raw material has been systematically and persistently moulded according to the way of wisdom. The natural human inclination is toward folly and evil. Wisdom is a potent means to overcome this tendency, to bring forward that true human being that Yahweh rejoices in, offering external success and internal satisfaction, both of which together form a healthy human existence.

The Social Perspective of Proverbs

The impression could be gained that the proverbial perspective is strongly individualistic, concerned with the success and prosperity of a single person at a time.[27] This would be to misunderstand the sages. While the book addresses itself to an individual and the depiction of success is largely in individual terms, in general, prosperity is understood in the book as happening in the context of the progress and affluence of a community to which the individual belongs. Wisdom is not simply a tool of bringing order and success to an individual's life, but also a means for creating order on the social level. The righteous and wise uphold such an order, principally to do with justice, while the fools reject and pervert it. The most elaborate expression of this sentiment is in my view found in the following passage:

> To be partial in judgement is not good. Who calls the guilty innocent, people will curse him, nations will scold him. But those who reproach will be pleasant,

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[26] 𝔐 לֶחֶם missing in one manuscript and the versions. However, the parallelism calls for an object, so that it is more likely that the word dropped out as a case of haplography and 𝔐 should be retained. 𝔐 has אֶת־ with the indefinite לֶחֶם, which Driver (1951b:187) proposes to transpose to read אֶת־רַע עָיִן (*with* ...). However, אֶת־ can be occasionally used with indefinite nouns, and further, a simple construct relationship between לֶחֶם and רַע עָיִן is preferable in the context.

[27] For instance Rylaarsdam (1946:52).

> and good blessing will come upon them. He kisses lips,[28] who gives straight answers.
>
> Get done your business outside, make it ready in the field that belongs to you, after that, also build your house.
>
> Do not be a witness against your neighbour when there is no cause,[29] and [do not] mislead[30] with your lips. Do not say: 'As he did to me, so I will do to him! I will repay the man according to his deed'.
>
> I crossed[31] over a field of a lazy man, and over a vineyard of a man with no sense. And look: all over it weeds were coming up, chickweed covered its surface, and its stone wall was breached. And I observed and I took it to my heart, I saw and I learned a lesson: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to lie down, and your poverty comes like a tinker,[32] and your need like a shielded warrior.[33] [Prov 24:23B-34]

The key to understanding this final sub-collection from Prov 10-24 is in my view in its interlocking structure. The text consists of two thematic groups of material, 23B-26, 28-29 on the one hand and 27, 30-34 on the other hand. The first group deals with the need to uphold justice in all circumstances, irrespective of personal feelings, and hints at the importance of justice for the community. The second group has an agricultural theme, explaining the need to take care of the primary asset, the land, and emphasising the priority of the stewardship of the land over everything else. These two thematic groups, however, were not simply juxtaposed, but rather locked together by placing v. 27 within the former group. This arrangement is in my view intentional, turning the literal meaning of the second group into a metaphor explaining the consequences of the failure to follow the advice of the former

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[28] 𝔊 χείλη δὲ φιλήσουσιν ἀποκρινόμενα λόγους ἀγαθούς, *lips that love answer good words*, is a free rendering of 𝔐.

[29] L עֵד־חִנָּם; one manuscript חָמָס; 𝔊(S) ψευδὴς μάρτυς. The versions are most likely reading the same text as that of L and interpreting it; they do not offer clear support for the alternative Hebrew (*pace* BHS).

[30] 𝔐 וַהֲפִתִּיתָ is difficult. The initial ה could be understood as a question marker, e.g. Toy (456) who deletes it. Another possibility is that it was originally a ת, thus, Driver (1951b:189) proposes to read תפתהו, rendering *and do (not) break, i.e., slander, him with thy lips*. I prefer to read the verb as a Hiphil, with the negative from the A colon carrying its force over. The verb has an imperative force, the tense following the usual rules after wav relative.

[31] Omitted by 𝔊, instead inserting ὥσπερ, see also n. 34 below.

[32] L מִתְהַלֵּךְ, possibly iterative sense of Hithpael which some argued appears with the root הלך (see WOC 26.1.2b). Some manuscripts and 𝔗 read here כְּמִהַלֵּךְ as in Prov 6:11. This is a preferable reading, producing better parallelism between the two colons and is adopted here. The Pi implies state, for the adopted rendering see McKane (1970:324).

[33] Albright (1955:9-10) derives מָגֵן from Ugaritic root *mgn*, *to beg*, i.e., *like a beggar*; such a rendering is a distinct possibility.

sayings.[34] Just as the sensible farmer knows that caring for the external assets has to take priority over that which may seem to produce more immediate benefit, such as building a comfortable house, so the upholding of justice within one's community must take priority over settling of personal grievances; individual welfare stems from that of the surrounding community.

This perspective is implied in a number of other places, and in particular, the concept of righteousness is set in a communal context; a righteous person is someone whose actions benefit the community:

> The lips of a righteous person feed[35] many, but fools die in lack of sense. [Prov 10:21]
>
> In the success of righteous people the city rejoices, and in the destruction of the wicked ones there is shouting of happiness. In the blessing of upright people a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down. [Prov 11:10-11]
>
> When the righteous multiply,[36] people rejoice, but when the ruler is wicked[37] people sigh. [Prov 29:2]
>
> The memory of the righteous [leads] to blessing, but the name of wicked people rots. [Prov 10:7]

It is, therefore, necessary to conclude that in the proverbial perspective, where wisdom and righteousness are virtually synonymous, the individual is always intrinsically linked to a community and the book's focus on the individual cannot be equated with individualism in the modern sense of the word. Proverbs does not see a person as an isolated self, but always implicitly interacting with others, as belonging to a collective.

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[34] Note that while the instruction of vv. 23B-26 has a formal motive clause and vv. 30-34 form a motive for the instruction of v. 27, the instruction of vv. 28-29 is left without motivation, which in the proposed reading is supplied by the combined text of vv. 27, 30-34. Further, it is likely that this is how 𝔊 understood the text, because by omitting the verbs in v. 30, and replacing them with ὥσπερ, vv. 30-34 are explicitly linked to what precedes (there is no referent for ὥσπερ in vv. 31-34). The added clause ἐὰν δὲ τοῦτο ποιῇς then refers not only to v. 33, but also to v. 29.

[35] 𝔐 יִרְעוּ; 𝔊 reading יֵדְעוּ which corresponds well with *in lack of sense* in the B colon, but does not fit the immediately following רַבִּים which is unlikely to be impersonal (note also that the B colon is modified in 𝔊, לֵב being omitted).

[36] 𝔐(𝔖) בְּרָכוֹת; 𝔊 ἐγκωμιαζομένων, possibly reading בְּבָרְכוֹת. Toy(509) wishes to read רָדוֹת, *rule*. This is plausible, but without textual support, and unnecessary as the impact on the meaning is limited.

[37] 𝔊 has pl., probably an accommodation to the pl. in the A colon.

The collective and the individual form an inseparable unity and by distancing from the community, an individual suffers loss. The following saying expresses this sentiment quite explicitly:

> Like a bird fleeing from his nest, so is a man fleeing from his place. [Prov 27:8]

Such a perspective is also reflected in the fact that the vast majority of the proverbial advice pertains to inter-human relationships. Alienation from one's neighbours is seen as having most severe consequences to a person's well-being:

> He who brings trouble on his household will inherit wind, and a fool will be a servant to a wise heart. [Prov 11:29]
>
> He who gathers dishonest profit brings trouble on his household, but who hates bribes will live. [Prov 15:27]

The verb עכר rendered here *to bring trouble* generally implies unintended collateral damage rather than direct destruction, most often referring to causing alienation between two parties. The meaning of these verses is illuminated by the following text:

> Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. … Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me [עֲכַרְתֶּם] by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.' [Gen 34:25, 30, NIV]

For a family to be alienated from the community is not simply a question of loss of honour and dignity, but of economic downfall, a matter of life and death. Thus, while the conviction that an individual is co-dependent on the community may not be considered particularly revolutionary or significant, we need to appreciate the degree of such dependency that the sages imply.

If an individual's success is directly dependent on the well-being of the community, then it follows that the individual's responsibility is to behave in a manner that promotes such collective well-being. In Proverbs this is reflected mainly in two ways. First, one of the primary responsibilities of the wise is to uphold justice for all, both rich and poor. This takes a number of different forms, from honest business practices to juridical justice. The need to uphold justice for all, is

accompanied by the second contribution to the well-being of the community on behalf of the wise, showing mercy to the poor. Both of these aspects of wise living will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter, only one particular matter needs to be pointed out at this moment. While in Proverbs, poverty is frequently associated with folly, and is thus perceived as a self-inflicted condition, the sages also believed that the poor still deserve dignity, and remain a valuable part of society. Consider the following text:

> A poor person is hated even by his neighbour, but a rich person has many friends. Who despises his neighbour[38] sins, but who is gracious to the poor — it is to his blessing. [Prov 14:20-21]

These verses show concern that the poor should not be excluded from the life of the community on account of their poverty.[39] This attitude to the poor does not originate merely in feelings of pity for those who suffer. Rather, it appears to stem from a deeper insight into the way things are:

> The righteous man knows the justice of the poor, the wicked man does not understand knowledge. [Prov 29:7]

The person who perverts justice for the poor is not seen solely as wicked, but essentially as ignorant, not appreciating the wider implications of such a behaviour. The sages on the other hand do:

> Who closes his ears to the cry of the poor — he also will cry and he will not be answered. [Prov 21:13]

The exclusion of the poor from the community, whether by denying them justice or not caring about their needs starts a process in which the cohesion of the community breaks apart. This is the worst possible scenario for the sages, for in the proverbial world the individual's prosperity depends closely on the prosperity of that community.

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[38] 𝔐 לְרֵעֵהוּ, 𝔊 πένητας, *a labourer*, most likely an attempt to create a closer parallel with the B colon. It would seem to reflect a different social setting.

[39] I have argued earlier that there are no purely declarative statements in Proverbs, that even the sayings in purely indicative mode are rhetorically imperative (see p. 47). That this is the case with Prov 14:20 is reinforced by its juxtaposition with v. 21.

The proverbial society is not only tightly-knit, but it also appears to be fairly closed-off. This is best seen in the warnings of Prov 1-9 against strange women. While the precise identity of the woman in Pr 7 is debated,[40] on one occasion she is designated as a נָכְרִיָּה which most often denotes a woman of different ethnic origins. Yet, even if she is not a foreigner in an ethnic sense, she lives in a manner that is foreign to the proverbial community. She dresses differently (in the father's judgement as a whore), the manner with which she approaches the youth in the street is different from the customs of the proverbial society, she surrounds herself with imported things such as costly Egyptian linen and expensive spices. Further, her husband appears to be a travelling merchant, leaving his home for long periods of time. In this respect he fits the description of Prov 27:8 cited above, of a man leaving his nest; he does not belong to the proverbial world which for all practical purposes cares little about what is beyond its boundaries. Thus the whole household of the woman of Prov 7 stands outside of the customs of the proverbial world, and there is no doubt that it is not welcome; they are tolerated, but not accommodated.[41] In addition to this attitude to outsiders, it appears that in the proverbial perspective the local community ties can be seen as stronger than ties with distant relations:

> Do not abandon your friend and the friend of your father, and into the house of your brother do not go in the day of your calamity. A nearby neighbour is better than distant brother. [Prov 27:10]

These observations suggest that the proverbial material originated within a social system based on a small, close-knit community that would have been

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[40] See in particular Snijders (1954), Perdue (1977:150-51), Yee (1989), Washington (1994).

[41] This attitude toward outsiders raises certain questions in relationship to the proverbial theology. It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that Yahweh is a non-local deity in Proverbs and that the sages are prepared to learn from people of other ethnic origins. It might seem, therefore, that the present observations about the nature of the proverbial community contradict such a perspective. However, this is not so. The pivotal conviction from which the proverbial willingness to learn from outsiders stems is one of uniformity of the cosmos, and thus, of uniformity of human experience irrespective of local or national boundaries. Within this framework the sages do not expect that wise people anywhere could derive from their experience standards for living that are significantly different from their own. The cross-cultural unity is based on a shared framework of wisdom, the cross-cultural division on rejection of the proverbial wisdom. The foreign woman in our material is not rejected on grounds of ethnicity, but on grounds of different, incompatible ethos.

economically self-contained, with little systematic contact with other communities, and closed to outsiders who were not prepared to accept its own standards. It is only in such a small and economically isolated community, where nothing one does remains anonymous and on which one totally depends for livelihood, that becoming an outcast results in such severe repercussions as the material portrays.

What then was the socio-economic make up of the proverbial society? I have suggested above that the sages believed that all human beings represent their maker and deserve a certain dignity. This suggests that the proverbial society is at least, on the basic anthropological level, composed of equals. Some qualification for that statement is necessary. It has to be acknowledged that Proverbs is written from a male perspective, with the primary voice introducing the material being that of the father, and that it has a male as its intended addressee. Further, most of the proverbial characters, whether it is the righteous, the wise, or the villains are implicitly male, and the proverbial society as a whole is unmistakably patriarchal. References to women are limited to wives, maids and the stray women of Prov 1-9; women are never addressed, and no reference to daughters is made along the repeated addresses of the son.[42] In other words, women are only spoken of with the male world and social structures as the reference point, and are thus clearly perceived as dependent on the males. Therefore, it is more appropriate to speak of a society of equal males. Yet, to do justice to the proverbial outlook, it should be noted that there is no indication that the verses asserting the basic human dignity irrespective of wealth or poverty apply exclusively to males. Rather, the mother figure has a role in the education of the son that appears to be on a par with the father and the son is urged to honour her [Prov 1:8; 6:20; 23:22]; in fact, Brenner (1993:194-98) argues that some of the proverbial sayings about women have in fact a woman as a speaker. Further, the woman of valour in Prov 31 shows a great degree of freedom and independence in her activities; notably she manages significant financial funds of her own and she has

[42] Unless one counts the metaphorical use of בַּת in Prov 30:15, or the occurrence of בָּנוֹת in Prov 31:29 where it is used as a poetic equivalent of נָשִׁים.

a position of a great authority in running the household. Thus, while the proverbial world is undeniably patriarchal, it must also be acknowledged that a woman is accorded in it a position that has dignity.[43]

Within the proverbial world the most important socio-economic unit is the family. Altogether, words that have family as the point of reference, such as father, mother, son, brother, wife, husband or household, appear nearly 140 times in Proverbs. It has become almost critical orthodoxy to understand the father-son relationship in the book as a metaphor for what is in fact a relationship between a teacher and a pupil. Yet, there is not a sufficient support for such an understanding in the material itself. On several occasions, it is quite obvious that the real father is intended, and it is undoubtedly so where the father is accompanied by the mother in the parallel colon. In fact, the very first instruction of the book concerns obedience to both parents:

> Obey,[44] my son, the instruction of your father, and do not abandon the teaching of your mother. For they will be a wreath of grace to your head, and a necklace to your neck. [Prov 1:8]

The strategic position of this admonition should not be ignored. Other places where both parents are paired are Prov 4:3; 6:20, 10:1; 15:20; 19:26; 23:22, 25; 28:24; 30:11, 17; again the placing of Pr 10:1 at the beginning of a new section of the material should be noticed.

Also, in Prov 4:1ff. we are presented with three generations, the son, the father and the grandfather, while a clear distinction is made when the father refers to his teachers [Prov 5:13]. Further, the frequently invoked support of the Egyptian wisdom texts for the teacher-pupil interpretation is dubious. As Fox (1996b) pointed out, the Egyptian instructions are not intended for young pupils but for adults who often already possess serious responsibilities of their own and irrespective of whether the characters are real or fictional, a genuine father-son relationship is intended.

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[43] The other obvious exception to the equality is the figure of king. The role of the monarchy and the monarch will be discussed shortly.

[44] In the light of the B colon this is a more appropriate rendering than *listen*.

Thus, we are obliged to conclude that the primary identity of the addressee is that of a son, i.e., as belonging to the family structure. A person who rejects this structure and its arrangement is an abomination to the sages:

> A fool reviles his father's discipline, but he who accepts rebuke is prudent. [Prov 15:5]
>
> He who maltreats[45] [his] father and drives away [his] mother is a shameful son and behaves shamefully. [Prov 19:26]
>
> He who curses his father and mother, his light will be quenched in time[46] of darkness. [Prov 20:20]
>
> As for an eye that mocks [its] father, and despises obedience[47] [to its] mother, wadi ravens will pick it out, and vultures will eat it. [Prov 30:17]

As the preceding verses indicate, the family has a clear hierarchical structure. In general, old age commends respect in the proverbial society:

> The splendour of young men is their strength, but the adornment of the old men is grey hair. [Prov 20:29]

The young have to prove themselves to gain respect, for youth is synonymous with lack of experience and wisdom. In contrast, old age is enough to grant someone high esteem, because only wise people live long, fools die prematurely. That this age-based hierarchy applies fully to the family unit transpires through the father's invocation of the grandfather's authority in Prov 4:1ff and is seen very explicitly in the following proverb:

> Listen to your father who begot you, do not despise your mother because she grew old. [Prov 23:22]

The family is seen as a cohesive unit accountable for its individual members. A person's folly brings disrepute on the whole family, the entire house is shunned on account of an individual while a son's/wife's wisdom has direct bearing on the reputation of the father/husband:

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[45] 𝔐 מְשַׁדֵּד; 𝔊 ἀτιμάζων, which is probably a free rendering or a guess.

[46] So KBL^2 for Q בֶּאֱשׁוֹן, K(ʂ) בְּאִישׁוֹן, *in the eye of darkness,* i.e., midnight; omitted by 𝔊.

[47] The meaning of 𝔐 לִיקֵּהַת is uncertain. 𝔊 γῆρας, *old age* for which BHS proposes לְזִקְנַת, but possibly the translator did not know how to deal with the Hebrew, or knew a root להק, *to be old* (so Greenfield 1958:212-14).

> The crown of the old people are grandchildren, and the splendour of sons are their fathers. [Prov 17:6]
>
> A foolish son is a destruction to his father, and a contentious wife is continuous dripping.[48] [Prov 19:13]
>
> He who returns evil for good — evil will not depart from his house. [Prov 17:13]
>
> … her husband is known in the gate, when he sits with the elders of the land. [Prov 31:23]

The family is not just a basic social unit, but also the key economic cell of the proverbial society. The proverbial economy is land-based and the family unit is tied to a specific portion of the land:

> Do not move the ancient boundary, which your fathers established. [Prov 22:28]
>
> Do not move an ancient boundary, and do not enter the field of orphans, for their defender is strong, he will fight their case against you. [Prov 23:10-11]

These verses (and the related Prov 15:25 quoted earlier) show that the allocation of land to individual families was based on a long-existing tradition and was considered as fixed. Further, the land was to remain in the particular family even when the male head of the family died leaving a widow and orphans behind. Considering that nowhere in Proverbs do we find any indication that land was considered a commodity, it appears likely that the underlying economic system is similar to that depicted in the book of Ruth (it is certainly significant that Prov 23:11 uses the term גֹּאֵל in the context of land belonging to an orphan), or presumed by the Law of the Jubilee [Lev 25].

While the family appears to be the key element of the socio-economic makeup of the proverbial world, there are additional superstructures identifiable in Proverbs. Certain issues are settled at the gate:

> Do not steal from the impoverished because he is impoverished, and do not crush the poor in the gate. For Yahweh fights their case and will squeeze life from those who rob them. [Prov 22:22-23][49]

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[48] For discussion of the verb טרד see Greenfield (1958:210-12).

[49] For textual notes see p. 111.

The unmistakably legal language of this verse shows that the gate was a place where legal disputes between individuals would have been heard. It, however, should not be envisaged as a formal courtroom with appointed judges. Rather, it appears to be a less formal assembly where resolutions were reached through collective deliberation by those respected in the community for their wisdom and status. The openness of the gate proceedings to contributions of the broad public are indirectly indicated by the following proverb:

> Wisdom is high for a fool,[50] he does not open his mouth at the gate. [Prov 24:7]

This text implies that if the fool had been in possession of wisdom, he could have made a contribution that would have been taken seriously, i.e., the authority of one's voice at the gate is based on merit rather than formal appointment.

The gate would not only have been a place where legal matters were heard, but also a place where individual members of the community would have been scrutinised and either praised or criticised; what would have been said of someone at the gate had a major impact on the individual's life:

> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is a vanity, [but] a woman who fears Yahweh, she should be praised! Give her from the fruit of her hands, and let them praise her in the gates [on account of] her deeds. [Prov 31:30-31][51]

> How I used to hate instruction, and my heart despised rebuke and I did not listen to the voice of my instructors, and I did not stretched my ear to my teachers. I came so near to a total disaster in the midst of the assembly and congregation. [Prov 5:12-14][52]

The latter text does not in fact refer to the gate *per se* but instead uses the terms עֵדָה and קָהָל. These words refer to a formal gathering of the community. References to such an assembly are found elsewhere in the OT and Gottwald (1979:243) evaluates these in the following manner:

> Although the total number of references to 'the assembly' in demonstrably or probably early sources is not great, the impression is strong that the body of free-and-equal males gathered for stated cultic celebrations, for periodic redistribution of land, and for exceptional deliberations on matters of war and

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[50] זו רָאמוֹת; the translation follows a suggestion by Driver (1951b:188) to read רָמָה, *high*.
[51] For textual notes see p. 141.
[52] For textual notes see p. 193.

> of internal dispute … The *qāhāl* is, as it were, an instrument by which Israelites come together to reach collective decisions and to carry out ceremonial activities.

While קָהָל in Prov 5:14 may not refer to a large scale gathering, but only an assembled community of a village or town, Gottwald's depiction of the assembly as a 'body of free-and-equal males' fits the proverbial context. The exceptions to this picture of equality are few. Thus Prov 19:10 objects to עֶבֶד gaining an influential position in society, and a rather inflexible social hierarchy is painted in the following passage:

> Under three things the earth shakes and under four it is not able to bear: under a slave, when he becomes a king, and a fool when he is sated with food, under a hated woman that is married,[53] and a maid when she dispossesses[54] her mistress. [Prov 30:21-23]

However, it has to be appreciated that in Proverbs עֶבֶד is not usually a servant working for hire, but a slave, who is land-less and thus stands outside of the proverbial land-based socio-economic structures by default. This he shares with the עָנִי, but in contrast to the poor he is a possession of his master, whom he is expected to obey, yet, has no real motivation to such obedience:

> A slave cannot be disciplined by words, for he understands, but does not respond. [Prov 29:19]

It appears that one could become a slave either by birth or due to imprudence:

> … and a fool will be a slave to a wise mind. [Prov 11:29]
>
> He who pampers his slave from childhood, in the future he will be ???.[55] [Prov 29:21]

It is also clear that only the wealthy members of the society were able to afford slaves, who were in a certain sense the true sign of sound economic standing; the relative paucity of sayings concerning עֶבֶד indicates that the slave was not an essential element of the world to which the sages addressed themselves. Further,

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[53] 𝔐 תִּבָּעֵל; Van Leeuwen (1986:608), following der Ploeg, argues that we should read Qal, *under a despised wife when she rules*, but such a rendering has no obvious merit.

[54] L תִּירַשׁ; one manuscript תּוֹרִישׁ, but Qal makes good sense in this case.

[55] 𝔐 מָנוֹן, is unexplained. 𝔊(S) has ὃς κατασπαταλᾷ ἐκ παιδός, οἰκέτης ἔσται, ἔσχατον δὲ ὀδυνηθήσεται ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ, *who lives wantonly from childhood, will be a servant; at the end will suffer pain upon himself*, which is most likely a free rendering.

while the verses above say that such a state of affairs is undesirable, they indirectly witness to the fact that slaves sometimes gained a position of influence and maids became wives. In addition, these isolated statements have to be held together, for instance, with Prov 17:10 that judges a slave on merit rather than social origins and accords him a place within the regular family structure. Thus, while we encounter a certain tension in the book concerning the status of slaves, all indications are that the slave played only a marginal socio-economical role in the proverbial world.

The one element in the material that stands in contrast to the otherwise largely non-egalitarian outlook of Proverbs is the position of the monarch. Altogether there are some 40 references to the king who is perceived as a part of the established divine order represented by Dame Wisdom [Prov 8:15]. At the same time the association between the king and God is much weaker than is found elsewhere in the OT. Some sense of link between the divine and royal realms is conveyed through the juxtaposition of the Yahweh and king sayings in Prov 16 and is found more explicitly in the janus verse of this section:

> [When?] there is divination on the lips of a king when he administers justice,
> his mouth does not act unjustly. [Prov 16:10]

However, it is difficult to say, whether this verse is to be taken as a declaration or as a conditional statement. Overall, there are only two places in Proverbs where both God and the king appear:

> It is glory of God to conceal a thing, and glory of kings to explore a thing.
> [Prov 25:2]
>
> My son, fear Yahweh and the king, do not associate with revolutionaries.[56]
> [Prov 24:21]

In either case the link between the king and the deity is not particularly specific, and in the former case it even appears as if the king is working against the divine activity.

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[56] 𝔐 עִם־שֹׁנִים אַל־תִּתְעָרֵב; 𝔊 μηθετέρῳ αὐτῶν ἀπειθήσῃς, *do not disobey either of them*, i.e., reading שְׁנֵיהֶם and עבר. This reading is quite plausible, although it could be the result of the translator's unfamiliarity with שֹׁנִים. Thomas (1934) argued from Arabic for an existence of a separate root שנה with the meaning *exalted*, suggesting that this is in fact a warning against getting involved with people of high standing.

Overall, it is necessary to conclude that while the king is perceived as a part of the divine order, he is not portrayed in Proverbs as a direct divine representative.

The king has the power over life and death:

> The king's rage is messengers of death, but a wise man appeases it. There is life when the king's face shines, and his favour is like a cloud of spring rain. [Prov 16:14-15]
>
> Like a lion's growling is the king's rage, but like a dew upon grass is his favour. [Prov 19:12]
>
> The king's terror is like the growling of a lion, whoever irritates him sins against his life. [Prov 20:2]

However, at the same time, he is portrayed as being subjected to absolute divine control:

> The heart of a king is [like] canals of water in the hand of Yahweh, he leads it wherever he pleases. [Prov 21:1].

The king's main function is to serve as a juridical authority with the responsibility to uphold justice. And he is not only expected to administer justice, but to be virtuous and self-controlled in every respect:

> A wise king winnows the wicked, runs[57] over them the [threshing] wheel. [Prov 20:26]
>
> The king who judges the poor in truth, his throne will be established for ever. [Prov 29:14]
>
> [It is] not to kings, Lemuel,[58] [it is] not to kings to drink wine, and to high officials beer is a woe.[59] Lest he drinks and forgets what is decreed, and he perverts justice of all who are poor … Open your mouth for one who is speechless,[60] for justice of all sons of dumbness.[61] Open your mouth to judge righteously, and to administer justice [to] the poor and underprivileged. [Prov 31:4-5, 8-9]

The king further functions as a military leader, albeit this is only mentioned in passing [Prov 30:27]. Outside of his military and juridical roles he has no other

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[57] Hebrew *turns*. 𝔊 ἐπιβαλεῖ, 𝔖 ܬܫܦܛ, *brings*, both possibly reading Hiphil.

[58] It is possible that אֶל לַמְלָכִים is a case of haplography, with לְמוֹאֵל, and further that לְמוֹאֵל itself originated from the second אֶל לַמְלָכִים (so Toy 540), although the repetition can be for emphasis.

[59] 𝔐 K אוֹ, Q אֲי, emending to אוֹי.

[60] 𝔐 לְאֵלֶּם; 𝔊 λόγῳ θεοῦ, probably למלי אל, but the 𝔊 Vorlage seems to have been corrupted throughout this section of the book.

[61] 𝔐 חֲלוֹף; BHS proposes חֹלִי. Thomas (1965:277) suggests the rendering *dumb*, *incapable*, on the grounds of Arabic. The suggestion is attractive, since it fits the parallelism well.

acknowledged function and a certain degree of scepticism concerning the performance of the king as a judiciary is evident:

> Many seek the face of the ruler, but man's justice is from Yahweh. [Prov 29:26]

Thus, the image of the king in Proverbs is far from the strong totalitarian and semi-divine status of a typical ANE ruler. His impact on the life of the proverbial characters is marginal; there are no references to taxation or any other practical aspects of a centralised government. This is surprising if we are dealing here with a well instituted monarchy, for the taxation burden would have been significant and one would, therefore, expect the sages to offer some advice or comment in this matter, whether positive or negative. Also, while the number of courtly references is large enough not to be disregarded lightly, the frequently made assertion that Proverbs originated at the court for the education of the courtier, is unlikely.[62] Only a very few proverbs, apply specifically to a person with potential access to the ruler[63] and overall the impression is given that the monarch has been grafted somewhat artificially on top of a depiction of a society that is largely decentralised and in which the king has a very limited role to play.[64]

To summarise, the world of the proverbial sages is a world of a small, tightly-knit community, in which each individual's behaviour has a great impact on the life of everyone else. The most essential socio-economic unit of this society is a family, which has a hierarchical, age-based, structure, and is co-responsible for the behaviour of its members. Beyond the family hierarchy, the proverbial society is not significantly centralised and its affairs are run mainly on the basis of a consensus of those who earned their respect in the community.[65] It should also be noted, that while the proverbial sages were striving for a better, if not entirely ideal, world, the world in which they found themselves was far from ideal. The repeated reassurances that

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[62] See also Humphreys (1978); Whybray (1990:45-59); Golka (1993); Dell (1998).
[63] In my view only Prov 14:35; 22:29; 23:1ff; 25:5-6.
[64] This becomes even more clear when the Proverbs of Solomon is compared to such a work as the Egyptian *Instruction for King Meri-ka-re*. This instruction of an Egyptian king to his son and successor, in contrast with Proverbs, addresses the issues that such instruction might be expected to.
[65] Cf. Clements' (1993) conclusions that the primary focus of Proverbs is on family and city.

the wicked will not prosper and will come to disaster indicated that in reality there were wicked in the proverbial world that did prosper and righteous who did not. Further, the emphasis on preservation of the family framework indicates that this traditional arrangement might have been perceived as being under threat and that the book was shaped in a conscious attempt to avert dismantling of these traditional structures.

The Human World of Qoheleth

Qoheleth's Anthropology

The relationship between God and human beings in Qoheleth is, similarly to Proverbs, that of Creator with the created. Yet, Qoheleth's anthropology is fairly low in contrast to Proverbs. Qoheleth was familiar with high anthropological views in which human beings were considered superior to the rest of the creatures on the grounds that the human spirit, רוּחַ, is immortal:

> I thought to myself concerning human beings: God makes clear to them and shows them that they are animals. Indeed, as for the fate of human beings, and the fate of an animal — they have the same fate: as [is] death of this, so [is] death of the other and there is one breath to both. And there is no advantage to man over an animal, for both are passing. They both are on [their] way to the same place — both came from the dust and both are returning to the dust. Who knows? Is the breath of the human beings ascending above and the breath of the animals descending beneath to the earth? And I saw that there is nothing better than [if] man rejoices in his deeds for this is his portion. For who shall take him to look at that which will be afterwards? [Qoh 3:18-22][66]

It is quite clear from this passage that, as I have pointed out earlier, Qoheleth himself does not subscribe to such opinions; in spite of the lack of a categorical denial his scepticism about such an alternative is expressed subtly, yet clearly, by the rhetorical question of v. 21. Within the earthly realm, to which he limits his enquiry, he can find no distinction between humans and other creatures. In fact, he is convinced that it is the divine intention to demonstrate to humans that they are nothing more than

[66] For textual notes see p. 119.

earthly creatures, whose existence is fragile and without any genuine, lasting gain; the human being is just a הֶבֶל.

It is in the light of the finality of death that Qoheleth's final remark [Qoh 12:7] should be understood; in the context of the whole book, the spirit returning to God is not the quintessential human being freed of the earthly body moving onto a higher level of existence in a spiritual realm, as it is sometimes understood. Rather, the spirit is the raw life force that God gave all the living creatures, and which completed its 'service'. By returning the dust back to earth as it used to be, death restores the initial *status quo* and closes the profitless circle of existence. I have already pointed out that Qoheleth thinks that when one dies depends at least to some extent on how one lives [Qoh 7:17], but the proverbial claims about wisdom leading to longevity are not shared by Qoheleth. In contrast to the proverbial sages, Qoheleth does not perceive life in the terms of linear progress aided by wisdom, but rather as a rat-mill; no matter how much effort one makes and how fast one runs, life inadvertly returns to its very starting point. This difference of perspective projects itself into Qoheleth's system of values. In the proverbial world old age was a source of respect, longevity being a sign of wisdom, righteousness and ultimately of divine favour. These notions are foreign to Qoheleth:

> And remember your creator[67] in the days of your youth, before the bad days come, and years will approach when you say: 'I have no pleasure in them'. While the sun and the light and the moon and the stars do not darken, and the clouds [do not][68] return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house tremble and warriors bend and the grinding girls cease [to grind], for they became few and the ones[69] looking through the windows became darkened,[70] and the doors into the street have been shut; when the sound of the grind-mill quietened. He will rise to the sound of birds, but all daughters of songs[71] will

[67] Gordis (1955a:340) suggests that the י could be a part of the suffix, with III-א verb treated as III-י. Some wish to read בְּאֵרֵךְ, *your well ~ your wife* (e.g. Crenshaw 1988:184-5), but it is questionable, that if enjoyment of a female companion was intended here Qoheleth would use the verb זכר, which he never employs in sense *to enjoy*. Several emendations have been proposed (see Seow 1997:351) but 𝔐 reading is supported by the versions and fits the context, in particular Qoh 11:9.

[68] The negative is gapped in the Hebrew.

[69] In Hebrew feminine, probably referring to eyes.

[70] Driver (1954:233) wishes to emend to חסך, *to cease*, but 𝔐 חשך fits the imagery of blindness better.

[71] Driver (1954:33) proposed that the reference is to song-birds, in contrast to צִפּוֹר which normally refers to a sparrow.

> grow silent. They also fear[72] height and [there is] terror in the path. And the almond tree blossoms and the locust drags itself along,[73] and the caper-fruit[74] bursts,[75] for the man is going to his eternal home,[76] and the mourners go around in the streets. Before the silver cord is torn,[77] and the gold bowl is crushed,[78] and pitcher is broken upon the spring and the wheel runs[79] into the well. And the dust returns[80] upon the earth as it used to be, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it. [Qoh 12:1-7]

While this final section of the book poses serious problems to the interpreter much of it being obscure, many of the poetic images reveal Qoheleth's view of ageing clearly; there is nothing desirable about being old. Longevity possesses no inherent positive value and can be more a curse then a blessing. If anything can be made of life, it is when one is young:

> If a man begets a hundred [children] and lives many years, and as many the days of his years may be, but his soul would not be satiate from the goods, and he even did not have a burial, I say: 'the miscarried one is better off than him'. For in futility he came and in darkness he will go and in darkness his name is covered. He did not see the sun either and did not get to know [anything], there is more rest to this one than the other. Even if he lives a thousand years twice, but does not enjoy himself, do not they both go to the same place? [Qoh 6:3-6][81]

> Young man, rejoice in your youth, and let your heart make you happy in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and visions of your eyes, but know that concerning all of these God will bring you into judgement. Remove anger from your heart, make evil pass away from your body, for youth and <prime of life> are futile. [Qoh 11:9-10][82]

This attitude represents a serious reversal of such wisdom values as we saw in Proverbs, for youth equals inexperience, and experience is one of the greatest assets of the type of wisdom Proverbs represents. However, Qoheleth does not simply reverse the values. Even the advantage of youth is merely relative, for within the larger picture youth is also futile, being unavoidably followed by old age.

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[72] L יִרָאוּ, the subject of the verb is not clear, probably, indefinite; one manuscript יִרְאוּ; 𝔊, σ' read ἀπὸ ὕψους ὄψονται, understanding the whole clause as referring to the birds mentioned previously. 𝔙 supports L.

[73] 𝔐 וְיִסְתַּבֵּל; 𝔊 καὶ παχυνθῇ, *fattens*; many manuscripts וסתכל, *becomes foolish*.

[74] 𝔐 הָאֲבִיּוֹנָה; σ' ἐπιπονος, *painful*, i.e., הָאֲבִיוֹנָה.

[75] 𝔐 וְתָפֵר; 𝔊 διασκεδασθῇ, *scatters*; σ' διαλυθῇ, *will be separated, put to an end*, α' καρπεύσει, *will be fruitful*; all of these readings convey the same notion of the caper pod releasing the seeds.

[76] Lit. *house of his eternity*.

[77] 𝔐 Q יִרְתֵּק, K ירחק; reading with 𝔖 ܢܬܦܨ, *broken off*, i.e., יִנָּתֵק, supported by the parallelism.

[78] 𝔐 וְתָרֵץ; reading Niphal with 𝔖.

[79] 𝔐 וְנָרַץ; reading with 𝔊, 𝔖, 𝔗 וְיֵרֵץ.

[80] 𝔐 וְיָשֹׁב; reading Px with the versions in place of the 𝔐 juss.

[81] For textual notes see p. 121.

[82] For textual notes see p. 203.

If the proverbial human is labelled as *homo docilis* then Qoheleth's human being is ultimately *homo limitus*; what humanity cannot achieve is by far more significant for Qoheleth than what it can, and human limits are repeatedly asserted. The fundamental limitation is the inability to understand the way the world is. In addition to Qoh 3:10-15, which has already been discussed (p. 81), the following passages should be also noted:

> All the things are wearisome — one is not able to describe [them]. The eye will not [ever] be satisfied by watching, nor will the ear be [ever] filled from hearing. [Qoh 1:8][83]

> When[84] I set my heart to know wisdom and to see the occupation which is done upon the earth (indeed, neither during the day nor during the night [the heart][85] was seeing any sleep with its eyes[86]), then I saw [concerning] every deed of God, that man is not able to find out the deed which is done under the sun, no matter how much[87] man may work to find it out, yet, he cannot find [it] out, and even if the sage should say[88] that he knows, he cannot find [it] out. [Qoh 8:16-17]

This intellectual limitation is the source of the failure of any other human undertaking, failure to make any true progress or gain, which is the issue that lies at the very heart of the book. Qoheleth's answer to the initial question '*what* יִתְרוֹן?' is a resolute '*none!*'; anything that he examines turns out to be הֶבֶל. The mere frequency of this term in the book says it all. It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that Qoheleth views the entire human existence as a pitiful and sorrowful business:

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[83] For textual notes see p. 122.

[84] L כַּאֲשֶׁר; 2 manuscripts and 𝔊 read בְּאֲשֶׁר. The former alternative is preferable as the causative sense of the latter fits ill with the context.

[85] The whole clause introduced by כִּי is best understood as epexegetical, explaining the intensity of the heart's search. Gordis (1955a:298) thinks the sfx on בְּעֵינָיו is anticipatory referring to הָאָדָם in v. 17, but this is unlikely because v. 16 describes the search methodologically while v. 17 presents the results reached, with the two subordinate clauses in 16 and 17 respectively being mutually independent and formally unrelated.

[86] Ogden's (1987b:141) proposal *there was sleep in his eyes, [therefore] he was not seeing* is forced, requiring *sleep* to be understood as a metaphor which is somewhat unexpected in conjunction with *day and night*. Furthermore, the *not seeing* here can hardly refer to the search itself, as it is immediately followed by the claim *and I saw*.

[87] בְּשֶׁל אֲשֶׁר should mean *on account of which* (e.g. Jonah 1:12), but that does not make much sense in the context. Therefore, reading with 𝔊 ὅσα ἂν μοχθήσῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ ζητῆσαι; cf. also 𝔖.

[88] The Px is best interpreted as modal; to express an actual claim or intention, e.g. Fox (1989:256), Sx would be expected, cf. Qoh 7:23.

> And I set my heart (in order to seek and to investigate by wisdom) upon all that which is done under the heaven. It is a bad occupation God gave to humans to occupy/afflict[89] [themselves] with. I saw all the deeds that are done[90] under the heaven, and behold, all this is futile and striving after wind. What is crooked, cannot be straightened,[91] and a deficit cannot be counted.[92] [Qoh 1:13-15]
>
> Indeed, what is there for a man in all his work and ambition of his heart, which he carries out under the sun? For all his days are painful and his business is sorrowful, and also at night his heart does not sleep — this also is futile. [Qoh 2:22-23]
>
> And I congratulated the dead, who already died, over those still living. And more than the two of them [I praised] the one who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil deed that is done under the sun. [Qoh 4:2-3][93]
>
> There is sickening evil which I saw under the sun — riches kept by its owner for their[94] destruction. And the riches perish in a bad business venture, and he begot a son, and there is nothing at all in his hand. Just as[95] he came out of the womb of his mother naked, he will again go, just as he came; and he will take nothing at all out of[96] his labour which he might carry[97] in his hand, [98]also this is sickening evil: exactly[99] as he came so he goes. And what advantage does he have, who works for wind?[100] Also, all his days he [is] in darkness and mourning,[101] and great grief,[102] and sickness and anger.[103] [Qoh 5:12-16]

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[89] The question whether לענות comes from the root ענה or ענן cannot be definitely answered. The modifying רַע in the previous clause suggests that the meaning here is negative, thus suggesting the former, while the use of עִנְיָן in the same clause points to the latter. Thus, it appears that this is a deliberate pun - the affliction and occupation are inseparable (see also note 76 on p. 80).

[90] The Sx denotes here a static point of view similar to the proverbial gnomic perspective. Qoheleth is not interested in only what is being done presently, nor what has been done, but essentially in what can ever be done.

[91] Reading Niphal with apocopated ה, e.g. 𝔊 aor. pass.; Driver (1954:225) proposes to read Pu infc. cs.; in any case passive sense is required by the context.

[92] Fox (1989:173) proposes to emend 𝔐 לְהִמָּנוֹת to לְהִמָּלוֹת, *to be made up for*, on the grounds that 𝔐 is a truism. While this statement is undeniably trivial on the literal level, it is not pointless, because on the level of the metaphor it encapsulates a key element of Qoheleth's worldview, indeed, the main point of the whole book, i.e., the fact that this world does not produce profit.

[93] For textual notes see p. 120.

[94] The ms sfx has עֹשֶׁר as its referent as Qoh 5:13 shows.

[95] 𝔐 כַּאֲשֶׁר; 4QQoh[a] כיא.

[96] Hebrew has בְּ, i.e., *amongst*.

[97] So 𝔐 reading Hiphil; 𝔊(𝔖, 𝔙) reads ἵνα πορευθῇ, שֶׁיֵּלֵךְ, i.e., Qal Px; The Hiphil fits the syntax better, as the notion of going has been expressed already in the verse.

[98] 𝔐 + *and*; I follow 4QQoh[a].

[99] Reading כְּלֵעֵמַּת with 𝔊 and 𝔖 in place of 𝔐 כְּל־עֵמַּת.

[100] Or *that he should work for wind*.

[101] 𝔐 בַּחֹשֶׁךְ יֹאכֵל; reading with 𝔊 ἐν σκότει καὶ πένθει, i.e., בְּחֹשֶׁךְ וְאֵבֶל. The confusion of ב and כ is common in the Aramaic script.

[102] Reading with 𝔊 (𝔖, 𝔗, 𝔙) וְכַעַס; 𝔐 וְכָעַס. Gordis (1955a:244) prefers 𝔐 on the grounds that if these were nouns the בְּ would have to be repeated with each one, but that is not necessarily the case (see WOC 11.4.2a).

[103] Reading with 𝔊; 𝔐 reads *he grieves greatly, and his sickness, and anger*. 𝔖 appears to have been corrupted early offering a number of variant readings. Gordis (1955a:244) wishes to preserve 𝔐 חָלְיוֹ suggesting the sfx is elliptical for לוֹ. However, in that case one would expect it with the final word of the clause. Delitzsch (301) understands the final two words as an exclamation, but the introductory וְ speaks against that.

> Indeed, I set all this to[104] my heart, and my heart saw[105] all this, that the righteous and the wise, and their deeds[106] are in the hand of God. Whether love or hatred humans do not know, all that is before them is futile, because[107] for all there is the same fate, for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good and for the bad,[108] and for the clean and for the unclean, for the sacrificing one, and for the one who does not sacrifice - as the good so the sinner, as[109] the one who vows so the one who is afraid of a vow. This [is] the[110] evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is the same fate to all, and even though the heart of sons of man is full of evil[111] and there is foolishness in their hearts during their lives and afterwards[112] - join[113] the dead! [Qoh 9:1-3]

It is the reality of a single fate for all, expressed in the last quote, that appears to be the one most unpalatable characteristic of human existence for Qoheleth, one which stirred in him particularly strong emotions:

> The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness. But I also[114] came to know that the same chance happens to both of them. And [so] I thought to myself:[115] 'The same chance as that of the fool happens also to me

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[104] Many manuscripts read אֶת־, instead of אֶל־; L is supported by 𝔊 and is syntactically preferable.

[105] Reading with 𝔊(𝔖) καί καρδία μου σὺν πᾶν εἶδεν τοῦτο, i.e., וְלִבִּי רָאָה אֶת־כָּל־זֶה. The lack of the letters אה is slightly more easily explained as a haplography on account of the similarity between ה and ת in 𝔐 than a dittography in the Vorlage of 𝔊 (in the case of dittography one expects the repeated consonants to be identical, but that would in this case produce a text which is nonsensical). The wording εἰς καρδία μου καὶ καρδία μου speaks for a difference in the Vorlage. If this had been a simple gloss, the repetition of καρδία in such an immediate succession would have been unlikely and it cannot be easily explained as dittography because of the preposition εἰς and the conjunction καί. Gordis (1955a:299) defends 𝔐 reading בּוֹר as from the root ברר, *to select*, because he considers the repetition of לֵב in immediate succession unlikely, but this argument carries little weight since the reconstructed clause is neither syntactically flawed nor awkward in any sense.

[106] עֲבָדֵיהֶם is an Aramaism.

[107] Reading הַכֹּל כַּאֲשֶׁר instead of 𝔐 הֶבֶל בַּאֲשֶׁר on the basis of 𝔊 ματαιότης ἐν τοῖς πᾶσιν (𝔖 includes both הֶבֶל and הַכֹּל, which is probably a conflation of 𝔐 and 𝔊 texts). Crenshaw (1988:159-60) prefers 𝔐, arguing for sense *everything is before them,* [2]*everything is the same to everybody*, but כַּאֲשֶׁר does not mean *the same*. Gordis (1955a:300) renders 𝔐 *everything is like everything else*, but this ignores the ל of the second כֹּל.

[108] Reading with 𝔊(𝔖, 𝔙) καὶ το κακῷ which is missing in 𝔐, but fits the list of pairs. Gordis' (1955a:300) thinks that this has been added on rhythmic grounds; more likely a word dropped out.

[109] Reading with 𝔊(𝔖, 𝔗, 𝔙) כַּנִּשְׁבָּע in place of 𝔐 הַנִּשְׁבָּע. The former is preferable because while the construction varies from pair to pair in the list, it is always identical for both elements in each pair.

[110] The article is lacking in Hebrew, but definiteness is required by the context. Fox (1989:258) suggests that it is a case of haplography of זֶה הָרָע, which is plausible, although Qoheleth's use of the article is irregular.

[111] Ogden (1987b:147) *painful thoughts*, but the parallel with *foolishness* suggests a more active sense, since foolishness is not something that happens to a person, but something one does.

[112] As there is no referent for the 3ms sfx in the context אַחֲרָיו must be understood here in a purely adverbial manner (Gordis 1955a:301). 𝔊 ὀπισω αὐτῶν; σ' τὰ δὲ τελεύτετα αὐτῶν; these variations are not likely due to differences in the Vorlage.

[113] Lit. *to*.

[114] The position of the particle is unusual. It would seem that its primary referent is not the act of knowing, but the persona of Qoheleth, as if Qoheleth's observation associates him with others who had reached the same conclusion before him.

[115] Lit. *I said in my heart.*

> — for what gain[116] am I then[117] wise?' And I thought to myself,[118] that also this is futile. For there is no lasting remembrance for the wise as well as[119] the fool. In those already imminent days,[120] both will be forgotten. But how can the wise be allowed[121] to die with the fool? And I hated life, because the deed, which is done under the sun, [pressed] bad[ly][122] upon me. For all is futile and striving after wind. [Qoh 2:14-17]

Here Qoheleth betrays how much he identifies with the sages who came before him. The ideal of retributive justice, so crucial to the proverbial sages is very dear to him. Unfortunately, it remains an ideal which is unfulfilled in his experience and he finds this reality difficult to swallow.

Yet, in spite of the bleak picture of human existence that Qoheleth paints, and even the strong emotions of dislike for life, he clings to life:

> Indeed, whoever is in the company[123] with all the living, there is hope[124] [for him] — indeed, for[125] a living dog, who is better [off] than the dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but as for the dead, they know nothing, and they have no more any reward, because their memory has been forgotten. [Qoh 9:4-5]

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[116] Taking יֹתֵר as a substantive, modifying the מַה of לָמָּה. It is also possible to understand יֹתֵר adverbially: 'and why have I, then, become *especially* wise?' (Gordis 1955a:212). However, in the context a degree of wisdom does not seem to be the issue — the polarity is not *little wise : exceedingly wise*, but rather *foolish : wise*.

[117] אָז is omitted by one Hebrew and several 𝔊 manuscripts, 𝔖, 𝔗. The omission is most likely due to the syntactical difficulties the particle causes.

[118] Lit. *I said in my heart*. 𝔊 + διότι ἄφρων ἐκ περισσεύματος λαλεῖ, *because fool speaks from abundance* seems to reflect a difference in Vorlage, but makes no clear sense in the context.

[119] Hebrew עִם. Some wish to interpret as comparative (e.g. Delitzsch 247; Crenshaw 1988:85), but that is in my view unlikely. Qoheleth expresses the comparative regularly by the standard construction with מִן, and furthermore the force of the preposition must be the same as in 16B, since it connects wise and fools in both cases. On this latter occasion the sense is undoubtedly associative — the point is not that the wise does not have more remembrance than the fool, but that neither of them has any at all.

[120] Lit. *already coming days*. I am inclined to understand the preposition בְּ in a temporal sense referring to *the coming days*, not as a part of a compound conjunction בְּשׁ־. If the latter had been the case, one would expect the ptc to form a clause with הַיָּמִים, but הַבָּאִים functions here attributively and the whole expression הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים as an adverbial modifier of the following verb.

[121] Modal use of Px.

[122] Gordis (1955a:213) suggests that רַע עָלַי means *it is worthless to me* on basis of טוֹב עַל in Esth 3:9. However, there the idiom means *to please someone*, thus supporting the rendering in the translation rather than Gordis' proposal.

[123] Reading 𝔐 Q יֻחְבַּר, supported by versions. That the K יבחר is a mere scribal error (*pace* Crenshaw 1988:160-1) is indicated by the fact that the object of בחר is not introduced by אֶל, which however is used with חבר (e.g. Gen 14:3). Placing a pause between בחר and אֶל, as the 𝔐 accents do, to avoid this problem, i.e., *whoever is chosen, there is hope to all living*, yields a poor sense.

[124] The MH sense of בִּטָּחוֹן. Fox (1989:258) *something that can be relied on*, i.e., death, but the hope in vv. 4-5 is that of some reward that the dead do not possess anymore.

[125] The preposition לְ is omitted in 𝔊, 𝔖.

> The light is sweet and it is pleasant for eyes to see the sun. Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in all of them, but let him remember the dark days, for they could be many, all that comes is futile. [Qoh 11:7-8]

These two quotes should be supplemented by all the repeated calls to eat and drink and enjoy life scattered through the book, and together with the previously quoted text paint two diametrically contrasting views of life, on the one hand as pitiful, unjust and pointless existence, on the other hand as something that can and should be enjoyed. They stand in tension in the book, yet, they are not irreconcilable. As I have argued earlier, Qoheleth operates on two distinct levels; one which is abstract and all-encompassing on which he is asking about the meaning of life, and another which is very concrete, the here and now. In the former there is no יִתְרוֹן, there is no higher meaning to life, human existence is not more than the process of dying. On the latter level there are ups and downs, and the ups can be exploited. Thus, paradoxically, life can be worth living although it produces nothing of any genuine value.[126]

While he spends much time dealing with the nature of human existence, Qoheleth shows only limited interest in human character. Yet, the comments he makes are not dissimilar to those we found in Proverbs: he observes that human beings have an inclination toward evil [Qoh 8:11; 9:3], that human appetite is insatiable [Qoh 6:7] and that human integrity is fragile [Qoh 7:7]. Also, envy is a widespread emotion in Qoheleth's world:

> And I saw that [on behalf of] all the fruit[127] and all the success of work man is envied[128] by his neighbour. [Qoh 4:4]

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[126] A similar understanding of Qoheleth's quest was recently expressed by Christianson (1998:216-254).

[127] עָמָל here in the sense of the product of work. Fox (1989:202) is of the opinion that here it refers to the activity because of the parallel with כִּשָּׁרוֹן and because the context is about reasonableness of effort. However, כִּשָּׁרוֹן also means success and this rendering makes better sense here, since it forms a construct chain with הַמַּשָּׂה. Furthermore, an outcome and an effort are closely related, so that it is not inappropriate to talk about an outcome in the context of the effort.

[128] Lit. *envy of man*. Gordis (1955a:150) understands this as the one who is working being driven by rivalry. However, it appears to be more natural to think that skill/success is the object rather than the product of envy. Furthermore, in my view it is not very likely that Qoheleth would claim that all work is envy-driven, considering that his own undertaking in Qoh 2 was driven by wisdom and search for a personal advantage.

At this point it needs to be noted that what is rendered here as *envy* is the Hebrew קִנְאָה, the jealousy that was considered by the proverbial sages as the strongest emotion of all. Qoheleth further observes that people are inclined to apply different standards to others than themselves [Qoh 7:21], and in harmony with the proverbial sages, he considers the internal human reality as more important than the external. This is particularly well captured by the following sayings:

> [A good][129] name is better than quality oil, and the day of death than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting because that is the end of every man, and the living one should ponder [it]. Sadness is better than laughter, for when the face is distressed,[130] the heart will be well.[131] The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of joy. [Qoh 7:1-4]

The second half of the first saying is puzzling, but it should most likely be understood in the light of the first colon, for it cannot be said at birth what the person is like, only at the end of person's life can an accurate judgement be made. We can also note that similarly to the Proverbs, Qoheleth views the difficult times as character building, they drive home to one the true realities of life.

I have pointed out in chapter 3 (p. 131) that Qoheleth apportions a certain degree of blame to God for human wickedness. However, it needs to be understood that this refers only to the secondary causes of evil, for he asserts that by not putting into place strict and swift retributive justice God encourages wickedness. Yet, Qoheleth does not lay any blame on God for the primary causes of evil, i.e., he does not assert that God made humans evil, rather the opposite:

> All this I tested concerning[132] Wisdom: I said, 'let me be wise', but She[133] is far from me. [She] is[134] distant from that which is,[135] and very deep, who can

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[129] טוֹב functions predicatively in 1Aa and attributively in 1Ab. The attributive use in 1Ab implies an additional gapped טוֹב with attributive sense in 1Aa.

[130] Lit. *bad*.

[131] I agree with Gordis (1955a:258) that the phrase should be understood in an intellectual sense, e.g., *understanding improves*.

[132] Wisdom is here not an instrument, but an object of Qoheleth's scrutiny, cf. the same idiomatic construction לִבָּה־בָּנָא אֲנַסֵּכָה בְשִׂמְחָה in Qoh 2:1 where the context shows clearly that שִׂמְחָה is the object of the testing.

[133] The referent of the pronoun here is *wisdom*, the only feminine noun in the near context. Fox (1989:239-40) takes the referent of הִיא to be זֶה, with the implication that it is all events of life that are far away from Qoheleth. This, however, is unlikely. The events of life are painfully close to

Continued on the following page

find her[136]? I turned in my heart[137] to get to know and to examine and to pursue wisdom and [reach] a conclusion,[138] and to know the wickedness of foolishness[139] — and Folly is madness.[140] And I find[141] more bitter[142] than death the woman, who[143] is a hunting net and her heart is a mesh, her hands are fetters. One who is pleasing before God will escape from her, but a sinner will be captured by her. 'Look! This is what I found', said Qoheleth[144] [adding] one to one to get [the] result.[138] [145]'My soul sought again — and [again] I did not find: one man out of a thousand I found, but a woman among all of these I did

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Qoheleth's experience, and he just declared that he subjected them to scrutiny. His problem throughout the book is solely in making sense of the experience, not in lacking it. Furthermore, the present interpretation is supported by the striking similarities with Job's description of Wisdom (Job 28).

[134] Hebrew הָיָה, but the present sense of 23Bb indicates that it does not denote past tense here. Probably best understood as gnomic, referring to universal and virtually uniform reality of the world, which Qoheleth repeatedly postulates, and thus best rendered into English by present tense.

[135] Reading with 𝔊(𝔖, 𝔗) מִשֶּׁהָיָה, *from that which is*. 𝔐 מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה does not make much sense in the context and probably arose by metathesis of the מ and ה (with the preceding adj. being feminine — note that 𝔊 has fem. μακρά in the A colon, but neuter βαθὺ βάθος in the B colon). The מִן could be understood as comparative, which appears to be the case in 𝔊, but spatial understanding of the preposition is probably better here, e.g. 𝔖 ܪܚܝܩܐ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܕܗܝ ܗܝ, *she is very far from all that which is*.

[136] Although the gender in the Hebrew shifts to masculine, the referent is still apparently *wisdom* from v. 23 (cf. 𝔖), for the theme of searching for wisdom continues until v. 25B (see also note 110 on p. 122).

[137] L, 𝔖, 𝔊 וְלִבִּי; many manuscripts בְּלִבִּי which makes good sense here. The overall meaning is similar in both cases.

[138] There is no exact English equivalent that would cover the semantic range of חֶשְׁבּוֹן in this passage. It denotes *calculation* in a mathematical as well as more general sense, and tends to have a more tangible sense than wisdom.

[139] The construct relationship is indicated by the accents, and the phrase is so understood by 𝔊 and 𝔖.

[140] The syntax of the final two words is somewhat obscure. Neither 𝔊 nor 𝔖 nor 𝔐 accentuation understand them as a construct chain and many Hebrew manuscripts, 𝔊 and 𝔖 supply copula. The article with סִכְלוּת is not attested in 𝔊, while 𝔖 has all three expressions in the colon definite. I prefer to read the construction as a clause commenting on the nature of folly. This fits with the fact that the statement about wisdom is preceded by a comment on the nature of wisdom in v. 24, and makes fluent transition into the following verse. The article with סִכְלוּת corresponds to the article used with wisdom in v. 23.

[141] Note the shift from Sx to ptc.

[142] Dahood (1958:308-309) renders *stronger*, but the parallel with *death* makes the common sense *bitter* very plausible here, cf. 1 Sam 15:32 (Crenshaw 1988:146).

[143] Hebrew אֲשֶׁר־הִיא where הִיא functions as a gender-marker ensuring that the subject of the nominal clause is properly understood.

[144] 𝔐 אָמְרָה קֹהֶלֶת; reading with 𝔊 ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής, i.e., אָמַר הַקֹּהֶלֶת as in Qoh 12:8.

[145] The relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר resumes the direct speech interrupted by a parenthetical comment *said Qoheleth adding one to one to get result*, and is best left untranslated. It is possible that *said Qoheleth*, the only occurrence of the 3rd person narration within the main body of Qoheleth, was deemed necessary to indicate that what immediately follows is parenthetical. The suggested emendation of אֲשֶׁר to אִשָּׁה (e.g. Fox 1989:242) is uncalled for.

> not find. Only, look at what I found, that God made mankind straight, but[146] they sought many solutions'.[147] [Qoh 7:23-29]

Admittedly, this is one of the most difficult passages in the book. In my view the key to this text is in appreciating that in vv. 23-26 we meet the pair of proverbial ladies, Wisdom and Folly.[148] Qoheleth 'flirts' with both, first with Wisdom, but finds her outside of his reach, deep and distant. Failing to befriend Wisdom, Qoheleth tries Folly, but finds her to be a deadly snare. He then asserts that God will protect those who please him from Folly, and it is in this statement that we should seek the key to vv. 27-29. What Qoheleth is looking for are individuals pleasing God. The conclusion that he reaches and expresses in v. 28 is to be understood as the result of a detailed search. Examining people around him one by one, Qoheleth claims to have found hardly anyone, or more precisely one male and no female, of whom he could say that they were not trapped by Folly, i.e., that they were pleasing to God. The final verse then introduces the explanation for such a sorry state of affairs. It is not that God made people wicked, on the contrary he made them יָשָׁר, *upright*.[149] Instead, evil perpetrated by humans stems from their search for many חֶשְׁבֹּנוֹת (see n. 147). The word חֶשְׁבּוֹן appears three times in our passage. The first occurrence in v. 25, where it stands next to חָכְמָה, shows that it is used here in line with the basic sense of the root חשׁב with intellectual connotations. The second occurrence in v. 27 shows that more specifically it implies getting to the bottom of things, obtaining definite, complete and unambiguous understanding, such as the result of mathematical addition. In other words, Qoheleth blames the fact that virtually no human beings appear to be pleasing to God on the persistent human insistence to understand (and

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[146] Disjunctive sense is preferable to simple co-ordination (*pace* Ogden 1987b:124), for the B colon has to be the reason for the failure of the search of v. 22 and must, therefore, be understood in a negative sense.

[147] 𝔐 חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת is in my view incorrectly vocalised. I am inclined to follow 𝔊 and repoint to חֶשְׁבֹּנוֹת. 𝔐 pointing could have been caused by nothing more than the daggesh placed incorrectly at some point, the vowels being subsequently adjusted to the new syllable division. The word חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת is otherwise found only in 2 Chr 26:15, where it refers to catapults, but such a sense is inappropriate in the present context.

[148] A similar understanding has been reached by Seow (1997:271-72).

[149] This word is frequently used with moral connotations which is always the case when it refers to a human being, and elsewhere in wisdom texts it is synonymous with צַדִּיק. This makes good sense in the present context.

thus control) everything around. One cannot avoid noticing certain similarities with the story of Gen 3, where the innocent couple defied their maker in order to know in the way God knows and thus became the object of his anger. Yet, it is not so much that Qoheleth brands the search for understanding itself as wicked, but rather the insistence on clear cut answers, חִשְׁבֹּנוֹת, where none exist. For the world of Qoheleth's God is ambiguous and cannot be controlled. Humanity becomes displeasing to God when it refuses to accept this reality, for God intended that humans do not understand everything, but rather that they fear him [Qoh 3:10-11].

Overall, Qoheleth's evaluation of human nature and inclinations is remarkably similar to that of Proverbs, except that the latter believed that the natural tendencies could be overcome through wisdom. Qoheleth does not make such claims and in fact appears to think that the driving force behind wisdom, to understand and to be in control, is also behind human failure to please God.

Qoheleth's Social Perspective

While Qoheleth builds largely on his personal experience, and much of his advice runs purely on an individual level, it should not obscure from us the fact that he does not think of humanity in strictly individual terms. On the contrary, humanity is to him a single, continuous flow of generations and it is precisely the nature of this collective flow that is determinative of the nature of individual human existence. This endless flow of humanity has two primary characteristics: the nature of its existence does not change from one generation to the other, the human world is as it has been and will be as it is. The second characteristic is the inability to keep track of individuals within this flow; people are born and die and are forgotten. It matters no more what they were like, whether wise or fools, they cease to exist not only in the physical sense, but also as an element of the endless flow; human society viewed from a distance is anonymous.

The social nature of human existence is not found only on the abstract level, but Qoheleth thinks of human beings as social creatures in day-to-day existence. Loneliness is painful and undesirable; human beings need the support of others and indeed find satisfaction in sharing the passing reward of any success:

> And again I saw futility under the sun. There is one but he has no other — neither son nor brother — and there is no end to his work, nor is his eye satisfied [with] riches. And for whom do I work and deprive my soul of pleasure? Also this is futile and it is an evil occupation. Two are better than one, because they have pleasant reward in their work. Indeed, if either one falls,[150] the one will raise his companion, but woe to him,[151] the [lonely] one when he falls — and there is no other to raise him up. Also, if the two lie down, then they are warm, but the one,[152] how will he get warm? And if someone[153] attacks[154] one [of them], the two will stand against him and a three-ply cord will not be easily[155] torn. [Qoh 4:7-12]

This brings us finally to the examination of the socio-economic structures that the book reflects. I wish to suggest that Qoheleth points toward a well developed monarchic set up. The royal figure is much more central to the life of Qoheleth's society than we found to be the case in Proverbs:

> Woe to you land, which is ruled by a servant and whose princes are used to feasting[156] in the morning. Blessed are you land, which is ruled by a man of free descent and whose princes eat at [proper] time for the sake of[157] strength and not for the sake of drunkenness.[158] In sluggishness[159] the beam-work will be[160] collapsing and in lowering of hands the house will be leaking.[161] They are making food for laughter and wine can make jolly life, but money is an answer to everything.[162] But not even in your thought[163] curse the king, and do not

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[150] Partitive use of pl. (Crenshaw 1988:111).

[151] Reading with 𝔊, 𝔖, 𝔙 and many manuscripts וְאֵי לוֹ in place of L(𝔗) וְאֵילוֹ. This could have been easily misunderstood by a scribe of a later period when the short i was also fully written.

[152] The English idiom requires nominative although in the Hebrew this is an indirect object.

[153] The subject of the verb is undetermined, the 3ms object sfx indicates that הָאֶחָד is the object of the verb.

[154] Such use of תקף has parallels in the Talmud (Gordis 1955a:232).

[155] Lit. *quickly*.

[156] Habitual use of Px.

[157] Hebrew בְּ.

[158] 𝔐 וְלֹא בַשְּׁתִי; 𝔊 καὶ οὐκ αἰσχυνθήσονται, *and will not be dishonoured*, BHS suggests בשׁת (ב) for the 𝔊 Vorlage, but the use of לא speaks against inf. here.

[159] The unexpected dual could be in anticipation of *hands* in the B colon, or the pl. ending could be a result of dittography with יָדַיִם.

[160] Habitual use of Px.

[161] Greenfield (1958:208-10) argues on the basis of evidence from Ugaritic for existence of a second root דלף, *to collapse*, which would make good sense here.

[162] Lit. *answers all*. Fox (1989:271) suggests *and money keeps them all occupied*.

> curse the rich in your bedroom,[164] for a bird from heaven will carry your voice
> and a winged creature will disclose[165] [your] word. [Qoh 10:16-20]

The king is portrayed here as a figure that ideally maintains the society in good order, likened to a house owner that makes sure the roof is sound. While similar statements can be found in Proverbs, there is one fundamental difference here. The monarchy Qoheleth is familiar with reaches into the inmost private parts of people's lives (their bedrooms) and does not tolerate any dissent. The monarch is an absolute despot, answerable to no-one; this notion is found elsewhere in the book:

> Watch the mouth of king and concerning a divine oath, do not be hasty. Walk from his presence, do not stand in an evil matter, for he does whatever he pleases. Because the word of the king is powerful, and who will say to him: 'What are you doing?' [Qoh 8:2-4][166]

There is some evidence that the world in which Qoheleth lives experiences imperial exploits of mighty rulers. Consider the following verse:

> There was a small city and few men in it, and a great king came to it, and surrounded it, and built against it massive ramparts. [Qoh 9:14][167]

It is not particularly significant whether Qoheleth had a very specific historic occasion in mind or not. What is, however, important, is that for the story that follows this verse to serve Qoheleth's purposes, it must be compatible with the common experience of his day, for it is experience that confirms or disproves what is and is not true in Qoheleth's epistemology. Now, great kings do not go about laying siege to insignificant cities to subdue them. Such work can be carried out by their military commanders.[168] Mighty kings are only interested in mighty exploits. The only context in which a story of a mighty king personally supervising a siege of a small city is credible (and credibility is essential for Qoheleth) is that of a large-scale

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[163] Thomas (1949) proposed to derive מַדָּע from ידע, *to be still*, on basis of Arabic, and render *even in your repose*, but the common meaning *thought* makes better sense here since the basic notion of the verse is *not even in the utmost privacy curse the powerful.*

[164] A few manuscripts read וּבַהֲדַר *and in splendour*; but L is supported by the versions and makes superior sense.

[165] As Barton (1912:179) pointed out, 𝔐 pointing of the verbs as jussives is most likely incorrect.

[166] For textual notes see p. 209.

[167] For textual notes see p. 55.

[168] One may consider for instance Joab's siege of Rabba on David's behalf in 2 Sam 11.

military campaign in which the taking of a small city is just one of many achievements, and its significance lies not in gaining control of the city *per se*, but rather in not spoiling the king's absolute and unchallenged victory. Qoheleth's world is one of such mighty campaigns where kings set out to make a name for themselves.

Furthermore, Qoheleth's world is not one of long-lived royal dynasties, but rather a world in which kings are overthrown by other kings. Yet, Qoheleth observes that while the rulers may change, the system remains the same, and those who welcome the new ruler hoping for a better future are soon disillusioned:

> Better is a poor lad who is wise, than an old king who is a fool who does not know how to take care[169] anymore. For he came from prison[170] to be a king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. I saw the living (the ones walking under the sun)[171] alongside the second lad,[172] who was to stand in his place. There was no end to all the people — to all those who were before them,[173] but those who came later were not happy with him. Indeed, this also is futile and striving after wind. [Qoh 4:13-16]

The king is not seen by Qoheleth as the upholder of justice; the social structures in his world are unjust and oppressive:

> And again I observed under the sun: the place of justice - wickedness [gets][174] there. And the place of the righteous - the wicked [gets] there.[175] [Qoh 3:16]
>
> I saw all this and paid attention[176] to every deed which is done under the sun: [there is] time[177] when man rules over man to cause him evil.[178] [Qoh 8:9]

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[169] The sense of Niphal of זהר in later Hebrew (see JAS). Gordis (1955a:233) understands the Niphal reflexively, but in the context of the passage the old king is unable to satisfy the subjects; therefore, a more active sense is appropriate.

[170] L הָסוּרִים has an apocopated א, i.e., הָאֲסוּרִים, as indicated by the vocalisation of the article; it is fully written in many manuscripts, cf. 𝔊, 𝔖, 𝔙.

[171] The clause is epexegetical as indicated by the accents and the fact that הַמְּהַלְּכִים has an attributive function.

[172] As Fox (1989:207-8) pointed out, the shift to Px shows that Qoheleth has yet another person in mind who is still to appear on the scene.

[173] 𝔙 and 𝔖 read *before him*.

[174] Note the locative ה on שָׁמָּה.

[175] Reading with 𝔊 and 𝔗 צַדִּיק and רָשָׁע. This is in my judgement the better reading for two reasons: (1) Qoheleth does not usually restate things, especially using the same word; (2) the theme of righteous and wicked is further developed in the following verse.

[176] Lit. *gave my heart to*; infa. + וְ resuming the function of the preceding verb, a construction common in LBH (WOC 35.5.2b-d) and used repeatedly by Qoheleth.

[177] 𝔐 עֵת אֲשֶׁר supported by 𝔙; 𝔊 τὰ ὅσα, i.e., אֵת־אֲשֶׁר, which is clearly an audible error.

[178] Reading with versions Hiphil with apocopated ה. 𝔐, 𝔙 read a noun, *to his evil*.

> And I turned and I saw all the oppression which is done under the sun. And behold, the tear[s] of the oppressed, and they do not have a comforter, and from the hand of their oppressors [comes] power, and they do not have a comforter. And I congratulated the dead, who already died, over those still living. And more than the two of them [I praised] the one who has not been yet, who has not seen the evil deed that is done under the sun. [Qoh 4:1-3][179]

The desperate tone of the last text suggests oppression on a scale that cannot be easily ignored. Qoheleth's examination of the way the society works leads him to the conclusion that the socio-economic structures are not just corrupt but are even intended to be an instrument of oppression:

> Should you see oppression of the poor and denial of justice and righteousness in the province, do not be astonished by the matter. For a high one is keeping in check[180] a high one, and there are other high ones above them.[181] Profit [from] the land is behind[182] all this; the king is served by the field.[183] The lover of money will not be satisfied [with] money, and whoever loves wealth will not [be satisfied with][184] crops[185] — also this is futile. [Qoh 5:7-9]

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[179] For textual notes see p. 120.

[180] Fox (1989:213): *to look out for each other*, it is impossible to uproot corruption; but Qoheleth is not so much concerned with the pervasiveness of corruption as with the reasons behind it.

[181] Ogden's (1987b:80-81) proposal that גָּבֹהַּ מֵעַל גָּבֹהַּ שֹׁמֵר means *more exalted keeper*, while the following plural has a superlative force, ignores the normal sense of מֵעַל as well as the fact that the plural sfx of עֲלֵיהֶם requires 7Ba to have a plural, not singular, sense.

[182] Lit. *in*.

[183] There are four key issues in interpreting this verse. (1) the referent of בַּכֹּל; (2) the function of הִיא / הוּא; (3) the function of נֶעֱבָד; (4) the force of ל in לִשָּׂדֶה. The suggested reading follows 𝔐 accentuation. There are three two-word phrases in the verse (a two-word phrase is linked by a conjunctive accent, Yeivin 1980:221): (a) וְיִתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ; (b) בַּכֹּל הִיא; (c) מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֶה. Thus (b) needs to be translated *in all this* with the pronoun not referring to the following clause but to the preceding verse. According to the accents נֶעֱבָד is not modifying שָׂדֶה, but refers to the king. The ל then has its common instrumental force. On the other hand, if the ptc is understood as modifying the field, the meaning of the ל, and consequently of the whole colon is obscure, e.g. the difficulties of the versions (in 𝔖 the king is the subject, tilling the field, yet, for that Qal ptc would be required in Hebrew; 𝔊 βασιλεὺς τοῦ ἀργοῦ εἰργασμένου, implying the king *ruling over* the worked field, in which case one would expect עַל or בְּ, not ל in Hebrew). Although in the two other places where Niphal of עבד occurs in the OT it refers to land meaning *arable*, the data is too limited for any generally applicable conclusions. The proposed interpretation is fully in line with the typical uses of Niphal, and further supported by the fact that in later Hebrew Niphal of עבד has a number of uses including *to be worshipped* (JAS), undoubtedly derived from a more generic *to be served*. Such an interpretation of v. 8 also fits the immediate context well. The initial structure *province/officials* in 7A/7B implies supra structure *empire/sovereign*, which is in 8A/8B represented by the pair *land/king* — the provincial policies are a result of the overall royal policies.

[184] The verb is gapped.

[185] Gordis (1955a:241) wishes to revocalise לֹא תְבוּאָה to לֹא תְבוּאֶהָ, *it will not come to him*. However, this fails to appreciate the poetics of the verse, where תְבוּאָה, i.e., the product of a field, establishes a link with שָׂדֶה in v. 8; 𝔐 supported by 𝔊.

The whole royal enterprise revolves around squeezing out profit from the land and the second half of the concluding proverb appears to be an explicit reference to claiming taxes from the crops.

It was observed earlier that while slaves existed in the proverbial world, they had only a limited role. This does not seem to be the case with the society of Qoheleth's day. Apart from the abundance of slaves listed as a part of the Solomonic achievement, Qoheleth addresses himself to people who possess slaves, and slaves have a definite place in the way his society is structured:

> I acquired slaves, and maids, and I had slaves born[186] in the house. I also had greater possessions, cattle and sheep, than all those who were[187] before me in Jerusalem. [Qoh 2:7]
>
> Also, do not pay attention to all the things that are said,[188] so that you may not hear your servant cursing you. For even your heart knows[189] of many times when also you cursed others. [Qoh 7:21-22]
>
> There is an evil [which] I saw under the sun, like[190] an error that comes from the ruler. The fool[191] is put in many high positions but the rich are made to sit low. I saw servants on horses and princes walking like servants upon the ground. [Qoh 10:5-7]

The last passage quoted above raises the question of Qoheleth's personal attitude toward the social arrangement of his world. At first glance, v. 7 seems to imply the view that the society has a certain built-in and proper hierarchy, i.e., that certain classes of people are destined to be rulers and others are not and should not be in

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[186] Taking בְּנֵי־בַיִת as referring to the slaves that were born to the master, in contrast to those acquired. The singular form הָיָה probably agrees with the head of the construct, i.e. *the house* (Joü § 150i), or it is also possible that בְּנֵי־בַיִת are conceived of as a collective. A few manuscripts and 𝔊 read pl. Gordis (1955a:207) interprets the whole clause as concessive 'I bought … *although I already had* …'. But the construction of the clause is identical with the one that immediately follows which is clearly not concessive, being introduced by גַּם. In the light of that the וְ in 7A is probably best understood as a simple copula.

[187] L reads pl., many manuscripts and versions read sg.

[188] Lit. *they say*, an impersonal plural with a passive function. Some 𝔊 manuscripts + ἀσεβεῖς; 𝔖 + ܪܫܝܥܐ; 𝔐 is preferable in the context since quite clearly this verse is not about listening to the wicked, but about eavesdropping in general.

[189] L יָדַע; one manuscript, 𝔊, σ' read יֹרֵעַ; 𝔐 reading fits the context slightly better — the concern here is not with committing evil as such, but with cursing by a servant in contrast to cursing by the master.

[190] Gordis (1955a:319) wishes to interpret the כִּי as asseverative, *indeed*, on the grounds that the verse is otherwise meaningless. Such assertion is untrue, and the examples of asseverative uses of כִּי he quotes, with the possible exception of Lam 1:20 and Neh 7:2, do not support such an interpretation.

[191] 𝔐 הַסָּכָל, *folly*, is used for poetic reasons (note the alliteration with בַּשִּׂפְלָה in the B colon) and is to be understood personally, cf. 𝔊 ὁ ἄφρων.

such a position (although the king may be ignorant of this natural order). Yet, the reference to the influential fool in v. 6, does suggest that Qoheleth thinks that people should hold power on merit. Such a notion is expressed more clearly elsewhere:

> And I said: 'Wisdom is better than strength, but wisdom of a poor person is despised, his words are not listened to. The quiet words of the wise are to be more heeded than the lamentation of a ruler over fools.' [Qoh 9:16-17][192]

> Better is a poor lad who is wise, than an old king who is a fool who does not know how to take care anymore. For he came from prison to be a king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. [Qoh 4:13-14][193]

In the latter passage, Qoheleth reports a case of an overthrow of the established order. An old king is replaced by a young man who is poor. Here Qoheleth explicitly affirms that such a youth is preferable, providing he is wise, in spite of the lack of any other formal credentials. In the light of these, it is most likely that Qoh 10:7 is intended to imply the precise opposite of what it is usually taken to mean, i.e., that those who have the power through their pedigree or connections are not always worthy of being the rulers, while those who hold the humble positions are sometimes the true princes, albeit unrecognised. Wisdom for Qoheleth should take precedence over any established social hierarchy.

Another characteristic of Qoheleth's world should not go unnoticed. Family ties, so crucial to the proverbial worldview, have very little significance for Qoheleth; he finds no sense of satisfaction in passing the results of his labour onto an heir:

> And I hated all my accomplishment[s] which I am achieving[194] under the sun, which[195] I must leave[196] to a man who will be after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool. And he will rule over all the produce which I skilfully produced[197] under the sun. Also this is futile. [Qoh 2:18-19]

While there is no direct indication in this verse that Qoheleth has a relation in mind, this can be safely assumed in the ANE context. This sentiment is reinforced by

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[192] For textual notes see p. 201.
[193] For textual notes see p. 171.
[194] The form עָמֵל, found here and in Qoh 2:22, is best understood as a Qal participle.
[195] Possibly *because* (Crenshaw 1988:87).
[196] Modal use of Px.
[197] שֶׁעָמַלְתִּי וְשֶׁחָכַמְתִּי form a hendiadys (cf. Gordis 1955:213).

Qoheleth's explicit perception of there being no inherent benefit in having many descendants:

> If a man begets a hundred [children] and lives many years, and as many the days of his years may be, but his soul would not be satiated from the goods, and he even did not have a burial, I say: 'the miscarried one is better off than him'. [Qoh 6:3][198]

One final issue remains to be addressed and that is the book's attitude toward women. Qoheleth has been often labelled as a misogynist, mainly on the grounds of Qoh 7:26, 28.[199] In my view such a charge is misguided. I have already argued that *the woman more bitter than death* of Qoh 7:26 is not just any female, but she is the personified Folly so familiar to the reader of Proverbs. In contrast, v. 28 does refer to real men and women and does display a certain male bias. Yet, as others have pointed out (e.g. Gordis 1955a:272-73), the difference between one out of thousand and none out of thousand is too small to justify the charge; the basic assertion there is that virtually no human beings please God, whether men or women. Also, for Qoheleth women are a part of the enjoyment of life, they figure in the list of the Solomonic achievements of chapter 1, and, more importantly, a woman is a partner[200] in enjoying what life has got to offer in Qoh 9:9. At the same time, the latter text implies that Qoheleth does not expect women to be among his audience, the world of wisdom as he knows it, just as the proverbial world, is a male world.

Summary

Considering the anthropological views and the socio-economic conditions that the two books reflect, there are significant differences between them. The similarities are largely limited to the views about basic human nature and tendencies,

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[198] For textual notes see p. 121.
[199] Recently Brenner (1993:201-202)
[200] She is not merely an entertaining object on a par with the food and drink; note the construction עִם־אִשָּׁה.

where both Proverbs and Qoheleth agree that humans are inclined toward folly and evil. The differences are much more striking. While Proverbs accords humanity a special place within the creation and is upbeat about the human potential, Qoheleth fails to see any significant difference between humans and other creatures, and as far as human capabilities are concerned, they seriously lag behind the aspirations.

The examination of the social arrangements that the two books point to suggests that they originate in two radically different worlds. One is a peaceful world of a community of a small village or town, where family and long-standing tradition are of the utmost importance. The king, when he appears, is more a symbol than a reality and his impact on day-to-day life is negligible. In contrast, Qoheleth's world centres around the king, the monarchy's influence penetrates as far as people's bedrooms. There is nothing cosy about the state, it is unjust and oppressive. Further, it does not exhibit great stability, it is plagued by imperial conflicts, and kings come and go; yet, the system with its pitfalls, remains.[201]

[201] Harrison (1997) argues that the socio-economic conditions of Qoheleth's world are best matched to the primitive market exchange, limited capital accumulation, and a strictly controlled economy of the Ptolemaic era.

Chapter 5

LIVING WISELY

In the previous three chapters I examined the basic elements of the sages' perception of the world: the way in which they acquired knowledge about the world, their cosmological understanding, their key theological views, what they thought of human beings. In addition, I have examined the socio-economic conditions they found themselves in. It is now time to look at the conclusions the sages drew from their respective perceptions of the world, and examine the kind of practical behaviour that the sages were seeking to encourage on the basis of their understanding. Put differently, I will attempt to formulate what constitutes wisdom from the point of view of the two books.

However, before I do so, I wish to come back to the point that was made in the previous chapter, namely, that the two books stem from diametrically different socio-economic conditions. Consequently, it should not come as a great surprise if the experience-based approaches to life that we find in the two books diverge from each other. The socio-economic divide makes it impossible to place the two paradigms side by side and then argue that one is superior to the other, as it is sometimes done. One can question the validity of either, when setting them against their own socio-economic confines, but at the same time one must refrain from seeing in them two different sets of answers to identical problems, for they do not share the same daily experience. True, the two underlying methodologies are similar to each other and their goals are in most general terms identical. Yet, we have to appreciate that from this basic common strategy stem tactical procedures driven by

the specifics of the daily reality, and thus of different nature; it is these tactical procedures that form the content of wisdom. The strategies can be compared, because they pursue non-historic ideals of prosperity and happiness; the tactics can be related to each other, but not compared in a competitive sense, because they are tied to matters fixed in time and space, starting with different initial conditions to which they address themselves. With this in mind, we can now turn to the sages' practical wisdom.

Wisdom of the Proverbial sages

It might be useful to open our consideration of what the proverbial sages considered as wise living with a review of the picture of the proverbial world uncovered so far. There are three basic elements to this world: cosmos, humanity and God. Of these three, the latter two are the dominant ones. The larger cosmos is more or less a medium manipulated by God in his dealings with humanity. On the one hand God reveals himself through the cosmos, on the other hand he uses it to shape human experience. The cosmos does not have any real autonomy and only very limited space is dedicated in Proverbs to deliberations about the cosmos *per se*. This shapes the practical advice of the sages, the vast majority of which is dedicated to relationships, God-human and human-human, but primarily the latter.

We have seen that the God of the proverbial sages is first of all sovereign over the world, his creation, and he is also a just God. The main result of this is a stable and just order operating within the cosmos, one in which evil returns evil but good is repaid by good. The retributive element of the divine order leads to a process of 'natural selection', removing those who fail to comply with it. In addition to being just, the proverbial God is also favourably inclined to humans, allowing them to gain insight into the nature of the world and the order he imposes on it, essentially wishing them to achieve satisfaction in life. Thus, although he does not grant humans success and satisfaction in life *per se* he fully equips them to achieve it, and also

provides an environment which creates a genuine opportunity to that end; the proverbial world is a good place to be. There is only one obstacle that prevents human beings from finding true happiness, their reluctance to accept unconditionally the divinely instituted order and to live in harmony with it. The proverbial human is naturally inclined to disregard this order, but this natural tendency can be overcome from within if sufficient effort is made and self-discipline applied.[1]

The Place of God and Ethos in Proverbial Wisdom

As we saw in chapter 3, cult plays an extremely limited role in Proverbs. As a result, the relationship between God and humans is largely indirect in the book, projecting itself mainly into inter-human relationships. The stable nature of the proverbial world produces a fairly rigid code for proper behaviour. The divine order defines what should be done, i.e., what is good, and what should not be done, i.e., what is evil. Thus, the notions of good and evil are absolute in Proverbs and all pervasive; virtually every activity that the book is interested in can be classified under these two moral categories. It is, therefore, justified to view the proverbial advice as a system of religiously motivated ethics.

This religio-ethical system is summarised by the phrase *fear of Yahweh*. The very first statement of the book about wisdom and knowledge is the assertion that knowledge starts with this fear:

> Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, [only] fools despise wisdom and disciplining. [Prov 1:7][2]

This is not an isolated claim, it is reiterated elsewhere in the book [Prov 9:10; 15:33]. The actual phrase *fear of Yahweh* appears altogether 14 times in Proverbs. There is much more to this expression than retouching the proverbial outlook with a pious sentiment:

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[1] Here lies one of the fundamental differences between proverbial and cultic Yahwism. In the cult this problem is solved from outwith, through the ritual of the cult.

[2] For textual notes see p. 183.

> My son, if you accept my words, and treasure up my commands with you, [if you] make your ear to pay attention to wisdom, if you stretch your heart to understanding, indeed, if you call for comprehension, give your voice to understanding, if you seek her like money, and like treasure you search her out — then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and you will find the knowledge of God. For Yahweh gives wisdom; knowledge and understanding [come] from his mouth. [Prov 2:1-6][3]

Compared to Prov 1:7, the relationship between wisdom and *fear of Yahweh* is reversed. Instead of *fear of Yahweh* being the source of wisdom, it is wisdom that leads to understanding of what *fear of Yahweh* means. Yet, it is affirmed at the same time that it is God who gives wisdom. In other words, the relationship between wisdom and *fear of Yahweh* is portrayed here as reciprocal, each one being the source and consequence of the other; wisdom promotes piety and piety promotes wisdom. Thus in Proverbs, *fear of Yahweh* is not only the beginning of wisdom, it is also its end; it is the one phrase that the sages choose to summarise their entire undertaking. The single most elaborate depiction of the attitudes and conduct summarised under that phrase is found in the following passage:

> Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding, know him in all your ways, and he will straighten your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes — fear Yahweh and turn away from evil. There will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones. Honour Yahweh from your wealth and from the choicest [part] of all your produce — and your stores will be filled abundantly, and your presses will burst with new wine. [Prov 3:5-10][4]

This passage confirms what has been said about the nature of proverbial wisdom in the opening paragraph of this section. Wisdom, i.e., *fear of Yahweh*, is essentially the awareness of the superior status that God has and voluntary acceptance of its implications by subjection to the divine authority and demand, which, in spite of some cultic element, has to do primarily with turning away from evil:

> Fear of Yahweh is to hate evil ... [Prov 8:13]
>
> The person who walks uprightly fears Yahweh, but one who twists his ways despises him. [Prov 14:2]
>
> In loyalty and truth guilt is atoned for, and in the fear of Yahweh [one] turns away from evil. [Prov 16:6]

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[3] For textual notes see p. 183.
[4] For textual notes see p. 73.

> May not your mind envy the sinners, but rather [may it be] always in the fear[5] of Yahweh. [Prov 23:17]

Quite clearly the concept of what is evil has a theological foundation, it is that which God abhors,[6] yet, it would be misleading to think of it primarily as a theological category; it has largely to do with what people do to other people as can be illustrated by the following example:

> Soul of a wicked person craves evil, his neighbour is given no mercy in his eyes. [Prov 21:10]

The relationship between the religious and the more anthropocentric elements of the proverbial ethics has been widely debated. One has to appreciate that the religious element of the religio-ethical system of Proverbs is closely linked to the proverbial epistemology that was examined in chapter 2. While the value judgement of whether something is good or evil is derived in each particular instance from accumulated experience, it is ultimately believed to have originated not with the observer, but with God himself, who created and maintains the universal order and indirectly reveals himself through it. However, the indirect nature of the revelation creates a fundamental difference between the proverbial religious perspective and that centred around the cult, for in spite of perceiving the advocated ethos as constituting a religious obligation, the claim of religious requirement in itself does not provide the ethos with an adequate authority. The authority hinges on a correspondence of the assertions made with the common human experience, for it is this experience that ultimately confirms the assertion of divine inspiration.[7] Thus the sages got themselves into a vicious circle; they need the claim of divine inspiration to

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[5] MT בְּיִרְאַת; Toy (438) proposes to emend to יִרְא אֶת, which would render a better sense, but the suggested emendation has no textual support and it is difficult to account for the ב. While it is true that it could have been inserted after יִרְא אֶת was corrupted to יִרְאַת, it is far more likely that יִרְאַת would have been restored to יִרְא אֶת instead of adding a new consonant. Thomas (1965:273) proposes to take יִרְאַת as a feminine abstract noun used as a collective term for a concrete subject, but none of the examples from Proverbs given by Driver (1951b:196) which Thomas refers to are convincing.

[6] This is made explicit on a number of occasions when the book speaks of certain types of behaviour as an abomination to God, e.g., Prov 3:32; 6:16-19; 11:1, 20; 12:22; 15:9, 26; 16:5; 17:15; 20:10, 23.

[7] In contrast, authority of a cultic obligation stems from the cult itself, without the need for experiential validation.

give authority to their empirical epistemology, but they need their experience to confirm this claim of inspiration.

I disagree with those scholars who see in the religious and ethical dimensions of Proverbs some kind of a later deformity. One may, for instance, quote McKane (1970:16) who states with implicit reference to Proverbs:

> There is a tendency for wisdom at a certain stage of its development to lose touch with mundane realities and to construct an ideal scheme of things ... marked by ... antithesis formulated in ethical terms ... this is ... the theory of a kind of Yahwistic piety.

Proverbs is not a book that contains occasional ethical terminology, the whole of Proverbs is essentially about ethics, the distinction between good and evil is all pervasive. Proverbs contains no technical advice on conducting any common activity, be it agriculture, skilled work or trade. On the occasions where the book deals with such daily activities, its concerns are confined to their ethical aspects. In no sense can the book as a whole, or any of its parts (even recompiled), be perceived as a manual for 'mundane realities' (to use McKane's terminology), for such realities are nowhere to be found in Proverbs. This cannot be overemphasised — one could not make a living by following the proverbial advice. This makes the assertion that the book contains earlier secular wisdom, of no ethical concern, alongside later religio-ethical wisdom wholly untenable. If the ethical dimension is denied to Proverbs, it has nothing whatsoever to suggest about how to live, and by the same token, taking away the religious element of the proverbial outlook destroys its authority.[8]

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[8] There is no doubt, that wisdom of the type found in Proverbs did lose touch with reality at some stage, e.g., the Joban dialogues. However, the nature of the causality is not that suggested by McKane, but rather its reversal; ethical concerns do not appear in wisdom as a result of losing touch with reality, but rather the loss of touch is caused by the ethics. At the heart of the tension lies a paradox: the value of experience present is denied on the grounds of experience past; that which numerous generations affirmed as true came to be perceived not as long-lasting but as truly timeless, thus unable to accommodate any shift. This is due to the theological perspective from which such understanding of experience stems; the notion that there could be a discrepancy between divine character and the immediate human experience is foreign to the tradition represented by Proverbs. The whole proverbial attitude has been aptly summarised by Van Leeuwen (1992:34):

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In the present shape of the text, this ethical nature is reinforced by the introduction to the whole book:

> Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of[9] Israel
> — to know wisdom and discipline, to comprehend words of understanding
> — to obtain instruction/discipline of[10] insight,[11] of righteousness and justice, and of that which is upright
> — to give prudence to the immature, and knowledge and discretion to a boy ([but] let the wise man listen and add [to his] learning, and let the learned man gain guidance[12])
> — to understand proverb and saying, words of the wise and their riddles.
> Fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge, [only] fools despise wisdom and disciplining.[13] [Prov 1:1-7]

Verse 3 makes it clear that the insight which is found in the book is inseparably tied to the notions of righteousness and justice. This link is expressed eloquently elsewhere:

> My son, if you accept my words, and treasure up my commands with you, [if you] make your ear to pay attention[14] to wisdom, if you stretch your heart to understanding, indeed, if[15] you call for comprehension, give your voice to understanding, if you seek her like money, and like treasure you search her out —
>
> — then you will understand fear of Yahweh, and you will find knowledge of God.[16] For Yahweh gives wisdom; knowledge and understanding [come] from his mouth.[17] He treasures up[18] success[19] to the upright, his is a

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> The sages' stance is to maintain faith in God's justice, even when they personally cannot see it or touch it, even when the recorded past does not verify it. ... The book of Job was inevitable, not because Proverbs was too simplistic, but because life's inequities, as reflected in Proverbs, drive faith to argue with the Deity.

[9] Two manuscripts עַל. This is the same construction found in Qoh 1:12, and could reflect a conscious attempt to make the connection between the two books clearer.

[10] ֽ adds וְ, but a construct relationship is more likely here, since unqualified מוּסָר has been listed in the preceding verse.

[11] Infa. used substantively (Delitzsch 54-55).

[12] The noun is derived from חֶבֶל, *rope*.

[13] מוּסָר has got more to do with physical disciplining than verbal teaching, cf. Isa 53:5, Jer 30:14, Ezek 5:15.

[14] The infc. is best understood as having a finite function, with the sun being its subject (אָזְנֶךָ in this idiomatic construction is an object of the verb); cf. ֽ ܐܘܢ ܐܢ ܐܢ, *and you incline you ear*.

[15] 𝔐 אִם; two manuscripts and 𝔗 read אֵם, possibly under the influence of similar imagery in Prov 7:4.

[16] Considering 5A, the genitive function is best understood as objective.

[17] 𝔊 ἀπο προσώπου αὐτοῦ, possibly reading פָּנָיו instead of 𝔐 פִּיו but the difference in meaning is minute.

[18] Reading 𝔐 Q יִצְפֹּן supported by 𝔙 and 𝔗; 𝔊 and ֽ read K וְצָפַן. Px understood habitually is slightly preferable.

[19] The meaning of 𝔐 תּוּשִׁיָּה is uncertain. 𝔊 renders σωτερία, ֽ ܫܒܪܐ, *opinion*. JAS suggests *salvation, stability, wisdom*. Delitzsch (77) understands this as a Hiphil-based formation from יָשָׁה, *to advance*, i.e., *advancement*. This is not an implausible interpretation in the context. Bauer (1930:77)

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> shield to those who walk blamelessly. He guards[20] the paths of justice, and keeps the path of his loyal ones
>
> — then you will understand righteousness and justice, and that which is upright,[21] [22]every good track. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discernment will watch over you, understanding will guard you. [Prov 2:1-11]

According to this passage to have wisdom means both to understand piety and to understand what is just and righteous.

Similarly Dame Wisdom asserts that she utters what is righteous and upright:

> To you men, I call, and to humanity my voice [is directed]. [You] immature, understand prudence! And you fools get sense! Listen, because I speak <important things> and opening of my lips: that which is right. For my palate utters truth and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness, there is no twistedness, no crookedness among them. All of them are straight to the one who understands, and upright to those who seek knowledge. Accept my instruction in place of silver and knowledge in place of choice gold. … My fruit is better than gold, and than chrysolite, and my produce [is better] than choice silver. I walk in the path of righteousness and in the middle of tracks of judgement. To make those who love me inherit property and I fill their storehouses. [Prov 8:4-10, 19-21][23]

It is the ethical qualities of the revelation that Wisdom offers that are the source of its value; it is here where the promise of success and prosperity is grounded. In contrast, her opponent Folly advocates life governed by immediate satisfaction without ethical considerations:

> Woman Folly is bustling about silliness,[24] and knows nothing.[25] She sits at the doors of her house, upon a seat at the heights of the city, to call to the passers by, whose paths are upright. 'Who is immature, turn here!,' and she says to the one who lacks sense: 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secret places is pleasant.' But he does not know that there are ghosts there, those she called [before] are in the depth of Sheol. [Prov 9:13-18]

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argued for derivation from יֵשׁ and a quasi-verbal root ישׁי. However, Delitzsch earlier rejected, in my view justifiably, such a possibility pointing out that such a formation is without analogy.

[20] Infc. with finite function, cf. Prov 2:2.

[21] 𝔊 κατορθώσεις seems to reflect a finite verb form, but this is most likely a misunderstanding on the behalf of the translator.

[22] 𝔘 + *and*.

[23] For textual notes see p. 64.

[24] BHS proposal that אֵשֶׁת is a dittography is unlikely considering the balance of the two colons, and the fact that there is no feminine form for כְּסִיל, cf. אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל (Driver 1951b:178-79).

[25] 𝔊 Γυνὴ ἄφρων καὶ θρασεῖα ἐνδεὴς ψωμοῦ γίνεται, ἡ οὐκ ἐπίσταται αἰσχύνην, *foolish and bold woman lacks morsel, but does not know shame*, but that appears to be an interpolation of a struggling translator. 𝔖 ܐܢܬܬ ܣܟܠܬܢܘܬ ܠܐ ܝܕܥܐ ܟܣܦ ܘܠܐ ܟܣܦ ܐܢܬܬ ܣܟܠܬܢܘܬ ܠܐ ܝܕܥܐ ܒܘܫܬ, *woman folly is deceiving, she does not know shame*. Thomas (1953) proposed on the basis of Arabic to read ידע in the sense *to be still*, however, the presence of an object requires a transitive verb.

Life, which puts that which is 'sweet' and 'pleasant' before that which is right, the sages say, leads only to disaster, even death.

The ethical dimension of wisdom is also made explicit in the introduction to the second sub-collection of Prov 10-24:

> Pay attention and obey/hear words of wise men,[26] and set your mind to my knowledge.[27] For they are pleasant, if you keep them in your belly, they will be ready together[28] upon your lips. So that your trust would be in Yahweh, I will teach you today, also you.[29] Have I[30] not written to you three [times],[31] in counsels and knowledge, sayings genuine[ly][32] true, so that you may bring back truth to those who sent[33] you? [Prov 22:17-21]

While the opening nine chapters of the book offer the most eloquent formulation of the *importance* of ethical conduct for those who aspire to succeed in

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[26] See note 16 on p. 35.

[27] 𝔐 לְדַעְתִּי; 𝔊 ἵνα γνῷς, i.e., לָדַעַת, but 𝔊 is quite clearly expanding here and the difference may not necessarily be due to a different Vorlage.

[28] It has been proposed to emend 𝔐 יַחְדָּו to יָתֵר(כְּ), *(like) a peg*, on the grounds of Amen. 1:16. However, the parallel is insufficient and the Hebrew makes good sense, as reference is made here to the words of the wise and of the father.

[29] 𝔐 הַיּוֹם אַף־אָתָּה; 𝔊 τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ, but that is probably an attempt to come up with a better sense than that of 𝔐, there is no obvious explanation as to how the two readings could arise from a textual corruption.

[30] 𝔊 reads *you*, most likely because the hireq would not have been indicated in the consonantal text. 𝔐 1st person reading is quite clearly superior here.

[31] 𝔐 K שִׁלְשׁוֹם, *the day before yesterday*, is difficult, but not entirely impossible considering the temporal reference in the previous verse (for this approach see Whybray 1994b). Q שָׁלִישִׁים, a term denoting certain high ranking officials in David's administration, could only be understood here as a majestic vocative, but that fits ill with the father-son discourse. 𝔊 τρισσῶς, *threefold* is a guess. שְׁלֹשִׁים has been proposed as referring to thirty sayings (cf. thirty chapters in Amen.), but since there are not thirty clearly defined sayings in the Hebrew composition, this is questionable. If the Hebrew text has been derived from Amenemope, which I think is probable, the editor took such a degree of freedom in adjusting the material to his own purposes, that it is unlikely that he would have felt compelled to retain the reference to thirty sayings (for a more extensive argument reaching similar conclusions see Whybray 1994b). 𝔖 ܬܠܬ ܙܒܢ, *three times*, possibly reading simply שָׁלֹשׁ. This could have been used to denote three times as a shortcut for שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים, and changed to שִׁלְשׁוֹם by a later scribe who misunderstood the idiom. While none of these solutions is satisfactory, I follow 𝔖.

[32] 𝔐 קְשֹׁט אִמְרֵי אֱמֶת, many commentators consider קְשֹׁט, common in Aramaic, as a late gloss, but as Cody (1980:419) points out, if omitted the altered text is unusually short for this section of the book. He suggests that אֱמֶת אֲמָרִים might have belonged to 21a, and a note on the form was made in the margin which slipped into 21b by accident replacing some other expression. While ingenious, the suggestion is not particularly convincing.

[33] 𝔐 לְשֹׁלְחֶיךָ; 𝔊 τοῖς προβαλλομένοις σοι leading some to emend to the root שאל. However, Cody (1980:419) points out that προβαλλω in the middle voice with a dative does not mean *to ask*, but *to accuse*, and the choice of the verb probably reflects an Egyptian influence. Cody then renders *to teach you probity fitting you to return reports which inspire confidence in the man who sends you.*

life, their ethical content *per se* is limited, in line with the observation made in chapter 1, that it is the sayings that contain most of the book's advice, i.e., the formulation of the book's wisdom and ethics. Yet, it needs to be pointed out that the ethical outlook of Prov 1-9, to the extent it can be formulated, does not deviate from that of the sayings in any noticeable manner.

The Nature of the Proverbial Ethos

The proverbial system of ethics is built around two pivotal notions, that of equal justice for all, and that of preservation of harmony in relationships. In a perfect world, these two principles would go hand in hand and would be to a large extent synonymous. However, in a real world where justice is always only an ideal aspired to (and the proverbial world is a real world with wicked people and injustices), these two notions stand in a partial tension. The process of accomplishing justice carries with it the unavoidable aggravation and alienation of the parties involved. Thus, an ethical system based on these two ideals will have to resort to a compromise. The sages place emphasis on justice for others and avoidance of conflict on one's own behalf. One is exhorted to treat others fairly and to see that others in the community are treated fairly, but nowhere do the sages encourage one, for instance, to start legal proceedings on one's own behalf. To the contrary:

> Fool's lips enter into argument, and his mouth asks for beating. [Prov 18:6]
>
> The beginning of strife is setting water[34] free, before the argument bursts out, drop it! [Prov 17:14]
>
> Do not come out quickly to argue your case,[35] lest what will you do at its end, when your opponent puts you to shame? [Prov 25:8]
>
> There is deceit in the heart of those who devise evil, but those who advise peace have joy. [Prov 12:20]

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[34] 𝔊 λόγοις, probably reading מְלִיץ, which destroys the poetic imagery; 𝔐 is preferable.

[35] Driver (1951b:190) proposed to render מָה as indefinite rather than interrogative, along the lines *lest you do something ...* but the object would normally be expected after the verb. Others propose, in conjunction with the suggestion to re-divide v. 7 and 8, to read רֹב in place of 𝔐 רָב, rendering *do not reveal to many* (e.g. Toy 460). While such a reading is quite plausible, 𝔐 makes equally good sense and its reading is supported by both 𝔊 and 𝔖.

These proverbs are a warning against starting conflicts. A wise person avoids aggravating others and does not allow conflict to escalate.

In order to follow the proverbial advice and avoid conflict, it is necessary that a person understands what its root causes are. A number of sayings, therefore, deal with the question of how conflict arises and what perpetuates it:

> Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers over all transgressions. [Prov 10:12]
>
> An angry man gets engaged in strife, but a patient person appeases dispute. [Prov 15:18]
>
> Charcoal[36] to burning coals and wood to fire, and a quarrelsome man to make strife glow. [Prov 26:21]
>
> One who covers up transgression seeks love, but he who revels[37] in a matter, alienates a friend. [Prov 17:9]
>
> Emptiness[38] with insolence produces strife, as for mutual consultation, that is wisdom. [Prov 13:10]

It transpires from these verses that the prime source of conflict was, in the sages' view, lack of self-control. People who are irritable, or get carried away by negative emotions such as hate, cause trouble. In contrast, a wise person is self-controlled, and approaches life in a rational manner, seeking rational resolution. Also, within the tightly-knit proverbial world problems are to be approached in a collective manner; collective wisdom has the potential to overcome the negative bias of an individual and to approach any problem from a more neutral position.

However, not all conflicts arise from a lack of rational approach. Some conflicts are caused by third parties, sometimes through careless talk, sometimes intentionally by those who can benefit from a dispute:

> A perverse man causes disputes, and a slanderer alienates a friend. [Prov 16:28]

While the sages prefer conflicts to be avoided or pacified before they gain serious proportions, they are aware that this is not always achievable. Although

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[36] 𝔐 פֶּחָם; 𝔊 ἐσχάρα, *a fireplace*, for which BHS suggests מַפֶּחַ, but the parallelism speaks strongly in favour of 𝔐.

[37] Rendering freely 𝔐 שֹׁנֶה, *repeats*; 𝔊 μισεῖ, i.e., שֹׂנֵא, but the rest of the verse is clearly interpolated from the context, thus casting doubts on the textcritical value of the 𝔊.

[38] 𝔐 רַק, *only*, 𝔊 reading רַע; I follow McKane (1970:454) repointing to רֵק, *empty*.

harmony in the community has a high priority, the ideal of justice for all cannot be abandoned because it reflects one of the basic tenets of the proverbial cosmology, that of divine retribution. Consequently, there is a need for certain formal means that can be used to resolve conflicts where the two parties cannot reach an acceptable solution by themselves. When a formal dispute cannot be avoided, Proverbs offers certain guidelines about how to deal with it. First of all, a personal vendetta is discouraged by the sages, even to the extent of prohibiting rejoicing at the misfortunes of one's enemies:

> Do not say: 'Let me recompense for evil!', wait for Yahweh and he will rescue you! [Prov 20:22]
>
> When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, and when he stumbles, do not let your heart exult. Lest Yahweh will see [it] and it will be evil in his sight, and he will turn his anger away from him. [Prov 24:17-18]
>
> If one who hates you is hungry, feed him with bread and if he is thirsty give him water to drink, for you are raking burning coals upon his head and Yahweh will recompense you. [Prov 25:21-22][39]

These proverbs show the unshakeable proverbial conviction that justice is not just a divinely inspired ideal, but that it is consistently enforced by God. Further, we can see here that the threshold that triggers divine involvement is very low, and thus any desire for revenge can in itself constitute an offence against the divine standard. The third saying then suggests that avoidance of personal revenge and repaying good for evil can have greater impact on the guilty party than retaliation would accomplish. Again, confidence in the ultimate sufficiency of the divine retributive order is quite clear here.

While all of these proverbs refer to, and emphasise, the cosmic system of retributive justice upheld by God, this does not mean that the sages principally objected to human-administered justice. The existence of a formal juridical system is clearly detectable in Proverbs. As far as the procedures are concerned, the information that the book offers is limited. It was pointed out in the previous chapter that formal conflicts were settled at the city gate by those respected in the

[39] For textual notes see p. 112.

community, or even by the king. It appears that on these occasions the verdicts were reached primarily by consideration of the facts when both parties were allowed to put forward their point of view:

> Who begins the[40] dispute [seems] in the right, but his neighbour comes and cross-examines him. [Prov 18:17]

However, sometimes a solution could be found by the use of a lot:

> Lot settles disputes, and separates between litigants.[41] [Prov 18:18]

This alternative is yet another sign of the sages' conviction of the absolute divine control over the world.

Within the juridical process an important role is played by witnesses. False testimony is considered a serious offence, as can be seen from the number of sayings that condemn such behaviour, for instance:

> A false witness will not go unpunished, and who exhales lies will not escape. [Prov 19:5]

In addition, the proverbial sages do not possess the modern notion of the right not to self-incriminate oneself. To the contrary, they expect the guilty party to come clean:

> Whoever covers up his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and repents will be shown compassion. [Prov 28:13]

While the information concerning the juridical procedures is scarce, the proverbial principles are simple and clear: to punish the guilty and to justify the innocent. In contrast to our modern-day justice process where emphasis is placed on not condemning the innocent, to let the guilty go unpunished is equally wrong for the proverbial sages as condemning the innocent. Both situations are unacceptable, for both fall short of the divine ideal:

> He who justifies a guilty person and condemns an innocent one — both of them are abomination to Yahweh. [Prov 17:15]

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[40] Hebrew: *his*.

[41] 𝔐 עֲצוּמִים, *mighty men*. I follow Driver's (1951:183) proposal to read עוֹצְמִים, *litigants*, from *עצם, cf. Syriac ܥܨܡ, *to go to law*; the case for the existence of such a Hebrew verb is strengthened by the use of עֲצֻמוֹת, *pleas*, in a legal context in Isa 41:21.

> To fine an innocent man is not right, or beat[42] nobles[43] for [their] integrity.[44] [Prov 17:26]
>
> It is not good to show partiality to a guilty man to deprive an innocent person of justice. [Prov 18:5]

Advice is offered not only to those who fulfil the function of the arbiter, but also to the interested parties concerning how one should argue one's case:

> Argue your case with your opponent, but do not reveal what someone else confided [to you]. Lest the one who hears will insult you, your bad reputation will not go away. [Prov 25:9-10]

Here the sages warn against betraying the confidence of third parties; a mishandled dispute can seriously damage one's reputation. It would also appear from this instruction, that the sages were concerned that the conflict does not spread beyond the two parties immediately involved. This anxiety is confirmed by the following saying:

> He who catches a dog's ears,[45] is a passer-by[46] who gets involved[47] in a argument that is not his. [Prov 26:17]

This concern is not surprising, for nothing could be more destructive to the proverbial society than a conflict that would end up polarising the whole community.

The no-conflict policy of Proverbs is not concerned with actions alone. It has been pointed out in the previous chapter that the inner mental element of human existence is of a greater importance in the proverbial perspective than external appearances. This is to some extent reflected in the emphasis on thought, and in particular on thought expressed, i.e., speech. The spoken word is seen as having immense power which can be directed toward both good and bad ends. It is the key to harmonious relationships and the ability to speak properly is, therefore, of an

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[42] 𝔐(𝔖) לְהַכּוֹת; Toy (353) suggests to emend to לְהַטּוֹת, which could be behind 𝔊 ἐπιβουλεύειν, *to plan against*.

[43] 𝔐(𝔊) נְדִיבִים; Toy (353) wishes to take it, on the grounds of Arabic, in the moral sense *righteous*. Such use is not attested in the OT, but cf. 𝔖 ܙܟܝܐ.

[44] 𝔐 עַל־יֹשֶׁר is difficult; McKane (1970:507) renders *improper* and Toy (353) reads בַּל־יָשָׁר on the grounds of 𝔊 οὐδὲ ὅσιον, *not pure/sanctified*.

[45] 𝔐(𝔖) בְּאָזְנֵי; 𝔊 κέρκου, *tail*, probably a free translation.

[46] L עֹבֵר, missing in a few manuscripts and not directly reflected in the versions.

[47] 𝔐 מִתְעַבֵּר; omitted by 𝔖.

immense value. Speech can mean the difference between success and prosperity on the one hand and suffering on the other. Consider the following proverbs:

> Man eats[48] good things from the fruit of his mouth,[49] but the soul/appetite of treacherous people [feeds on] violence. [Prov 13:2]
>
> The mouth of a fool is his destruction, and his lips entrap his life. [Prov 18:7]
>
> Prattling men stir up[50] the city, but the wise turn away anger. [Prov 29:8]
>
> In the blessing of upright people a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down. [Prov 11:11]
>
> The tongue of a righteous person is exquisite[51] silver, but the heart of the wicked is worth little. [Prov 10:20]
>
> The words of wicked people are lying in ambush for blood, but the mouth of the upright will rescue them. [Prov 12:6]
>
> A truthful lip is established for ever, but a deceitful tongue just for a moment.[52] [Prov 12:19]
>
> The lips of a righteous person feed many, but fools die in lack of sense. [Prov 10:21][53]
>
> The mouth of the righteous person thrives with wisdom, but the tongue of perverse things will be cut off. [Prov 10:31]

The basic rule of sound speech in Proverbs is 'less is more'; garrulity is perceived as a sign of foolishness and a sure way to get into trouble:

> In many words transgression does not cease, but one whose lips are silent is sensible. [Prov 10:19]
>
> One who guards his mouth keeps his life/soul, but who opens his lips wide [suffers] ruin. [Prov 13:3]

Sound speech comes as the result of reasoning, those who are quick to talk are bound to cause hurt. In contrast, the speech of wise people is soothing:

> One who speaks rashly is like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of wise people is healing. [Prov 12:18]

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[48] Taking the Px as habitual; Emerton (1984) proposed to read modal *may eat*, but this does not fit the B colon in which quite clearly the verb is gapped.

[49] 𝔊(S) reads ἀπὸ καρπῶν δικαιοσύνης φάγεται ἀγαθός, but this is most likely an attempt to fix more clearly the sense of the verse. Also, the translator understood טוֹב as the subject, but the parallelism requires it to be taken as an object.

[50] So NIV; פוח means *to exhale*, possibly the image is of blowing into charcoal to get it burning.

[51] 𝔐 נִבְחָר; 𝔊 πεπυρωμένος, *burned*, possibly reading נִבְחָן, *to test* (BHS).

[52] Lit. *until I repose*.

[53] For textual notes see p. 144.

This proverb shows more clearly what could have been noted in a number of the verses already quoted, namely, that speech has an impact which is not limited to the person speaking, but extends to those addressed and, further, to those talked about. It became apparent in the previous chapter that in the close-knit proverbial world reputation is a person's livelihood. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that those who ruin other people's reputations through malicious talk are disapproved of:

> An impious man destroys his neighbour by [his] mouth, but through knowledge righteous people will be delivered. [Prov 11:9]
>
> A slanderer reveals a secret as he goes along, you should not share with a talker. [Prov 20:19]
>
> Without wood, a fire dies out, and when there is no slanderer, strife grows silent. [Prov 26:20]

The problem with slander is that it is unlikely to be simply ignored, people are eager to hear gossip, and it takes root:

> Words of a slanderer are like greedily swallowed[54] [food] and they descend into deep chambers of [one's] bowels. [Prov 18:8]

We have observed in the preceding chapter that the proverbial society is largely non-egalitarian. This fact projects itself into the notion of living in harmony with others which is broadly applicable. It does not only apply to the relationships that are seen as potentially beneficial to a person, but also to situations where one may not get anything tangible out of such harmony, where one might be hesitant:

> Do not deny what is good to those to whom it belongs,[55] when your hand is capable to carry it out. Do not tell your neighbour: 'Go, come back, and tomorrow I will give [it to you]', while you have it with you. [Prov 3:27-28]

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[54] Hebrew כְּמִתְלַהֲמִים is difficult. The verse is missing in 𝔊 but in the identical proverb in Prov 26:22 𝔊 renders μαλακοί, *soft*; 𝔖 ܕܡܟܝ, *lay low*, appears to be a free rendering. The translation adopted above, based on Arabic *lhm*, *to swallow avidly*, appears to be the best option (see Toy 359-60).

[55] 𝔊 μὴ ἀπόσχῃ εὖ ποιεῖν ἐνδεῖ, *do not withhold good, doing short of [your power?]*, cf. τῆς δυνάμεως ἐνδεᾶ πρᾶξαι, *to act short of real power* (L&S). 𝔖 ܠܐ ܬܚܫܟ ܛܒܬܐ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܗ ܘܐܢ ܠܐ, *do not refuse to do good*, i.e., מִבְּעָלָיו was either omitted, or the translator read לִמְעֹבֵד. Toy (79) rejected 𝔐 on the grounds that בַּעַל always denotes the one who controls something, and בַּעַל טוֹב cannot, therefore, refer to one to whom good is done. However, the construction *owner of* is primarily a syntactical means of forming expressions of characterisation from nouns, i.e., A is characterised/associated with X, but not necessarily implying that A is in control, dispenses or employs X. Consider *owner of dreams*, i.e., one to whom dreams happen [Gen 37:19]; an *owner of affairs*, i.e., one who is involved in a matter without having a full control over it [Exod 24:14)]; an

Continued on the following page

> There is a person who scatters and still accumulates, and [another] withholding from what is right only to have lack. [Prov 11:24]
>
> He who gives to the poor does not have lack, but he who shuts his eyes, many curses. [Prov 28:27]
>
> She opens the palm of her hand to the poor, and her hands stretch forward to the underprivileged. [Prov 31:20]

Within the body of the proverbial material that is concerned with preservation of harmony among human beings, there is one group of texts that deserves particular attention. As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, the central socio-economic unit of the proverbial world is the family. In order to ensure the prosperity of the larger community it is necessary to preserve the coherence of the family both across generations and within a generation:

> He who maltreats [his] father and drives away [his] mother is a shameful son and behaves shamefully. [Prov 19:26][56]
>
> He who steals from his father and mother and says that it is not a crime, he is a companion to the man who destroys. [Prov 28:24]

The concern with preservation of the family unity within a particular generation can be seen mainly in the material that deals with the question of adultery and prostitution. This topic is most emphatically developed in Prov 5:1-23, 6:24-35 both of which are worth quoting at length:

> My son, pay attention to my wisdom and stretch your ear to my understanding. To keep discretion, and as for knowledge — let your lips guard [it].[57] For the lips of a strange[58] woman drip honey, and her palate is smoother than oil. But her ends are bitter like wormwood, sharp like a two-edged sword. Her feet

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owner of hair, i.e., a hairy man [2 Kgs 1:8]; *owners of horses* [2 Sam 1:6] implying control, but not ownership, since they are the possession of the king; in the case of *owner of tongue* [Qoh 10:11] possession is clearly not the issue at all. Further, בַּעַל itself can denote rightful ownership rather than present control [Gen 20:3]. Thus, while admittedly there is no other use of the construction that would be parallel to בַּעַל טוֹב, there is nothing to warrant a conclusion that it cannot express both an actual and desirable state. Since constructions like אִישׁ טוֹב refer unequivocally to a person who does good, this could be the only succinct way available to the author to express the desirable, yet unreal, ownership, with the semantic ambiguity being resolved by the context.

[56] For textual notes see p. 150.

[57] 𝔐 וְדַעַת שְׂפָתֶיךָ יִנְצֹרוּ; 𝔊 αἴσθησιν δὲ ἐμῶν χειλέων ἐντέλλομαί σοι, *understanding of my lips I command you,* for which BHS suggest שְׂפָתַי לְךָ in the place of שְׂפָתֶיךָ; I am inclined to think that the translator is struggling with a corrupted Vorlage.

[58] McKane (1970:314) considers the woman to be a prostitute, but the context (in particular v. 15) suggests that she is someone else's wife, i.e., an adulteress.

descend to death, her steps are grasping Sheol. The path of life she does not watch,[59] her paths are unsteady — she does not know.

And now sons, listen to me and do not turn away from words of my mouth. Distance your way from her, do not draw near to the door of her house, lest you give your strength[60] to others and your years[61] to one who is cruel.[62] Lest strangers are sated from your strength, and [the product of] your pain [is found] in the house of a stranger. Then you will groan[63] in your end, in the destruction of your flesh and body, and you will say: 'How I used to hate instruction, and my heart despised rebuke and I did not listen to the voice of my instructors, and I did not incline my ear to my teachers. I came so near[64] to a total disaster, in the midst of the assembly and congregation.'

Drink water from your cistern, and the trickling water from the midst of your well [or] they will spill out from your spring into the street, streams of water into the squares. Let them be to you alone, and do not share them with strangers. May your well be blessed,[65] so that you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A doe in heat[66] and a graceful mountain goat, her breasts,[67] may they satisfy you all the time, may her love have you in its power always. Why should you my son be led astray by an adulteress, and embrace the lap of a strange woman. For the eyes of Yahweh are fixed[68] [on] the ways of man, and all his paths he watches. The guilt of the wicked will ensnare him, and he will be tied by the ropes of his sin. He will die, because there was no discipline, and in much folly he goes on straying away.[69] [Prov 5:1-23]

For a command is a lamp and teaching is a light, and the rebukes of instruction are the path of life — to keep you from the evil[70] woman, from the smooth tongue of[71] the strange woman. Do not desire her beauty in your heart and do not let her take you by her eyes. Because of a prostitute [you will be reduced]

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[59] Proposed by KBL^2 on the basis of Akkadian; both 𝔊 and 𝔖 understood this in the sense *she does not walk in the path of life*.

[60] 𝔐 הוֹדֶךָ; 𝔊 read חַיֶּיךָ; 𝔖, 𝔗 חֵילֶךָ, but the latter does not imply a textual difference, as it could simply be the result of replacing a word with its more common synonym.

[61] McKane (1970:316) proposes Arabic derivation for שְׁנָה, rendering *dignity*, but such a meaning is unattested in Hebrew and the emendation is unnecessary as 𝔐 makes good sense.

[62] McKane (1970:316) considers it possible that אַכְזָרִי is related to *kizritu*, a class of Ishtar prostitute, although as he acknowledges, the consistent use of masculine forms speaks against that.

[63] 𝔐 נָהַמְתָּ; 𝔊(𝔖) μεταμεληθήσῃ, *you will repent/regret*, possibly reading נֶחַמְתָּ, which fits well the context.

[64] כִּמְעַט generally denotes a small interval, whether temporal, spatial or in a more abstract sense; cf. Gen 26:10 and Ps 73:2.

[65] 𝔊 ἡ πηγή σου τοῦ ὕδατος ἔστω σοι ἰδία, probably an interpolation from the context.

[66] For the sensual connotations of אֲהָבִים see Prov 7:18.

[67] BHS points out that some 𝔊 manuscripts read דַּדֶּיהָ, *her love*. 𝔐 is preferable in the light of the overall sexual overtones of the entire passage and of the following verse — the wife's breasts stand here in contrast to the embrace of the strange woman. Whether the mentioned 𝔊 manuscripts represent a genuinely distinct reading tradition or whether at some stage the sexually explicit nature of the text was muted is unclear.

[68] Lit. *directly*.

[69] Habitual use of Px. 𝔊 ἀπώλετο, *was destroyed*, for which BHS suggests יִסָּפֶה in the Vorlage, but more likely this is a guess on behalf of the translator who did not know שְׁנָה (note that he does not render it in either Prov 7:19 & 20).

[70] 𝔐 רָע; 𝔊 ὑπάνδρου, *married,* i.e., רַעַ; 𝔐 supported by 𝔖, but both readings are plausible.

[71] Reading as a construct, cf. 𝔖.

> to a loaf of bread, but a wife of [another] man will hunt your precious life.[72] Can a man rake fire into his lap without scorching his clothes? If one walks on burning coal, will not his feet burn? So anyone who enters to the wife of his neighbour will not escape punishment, anyone who touches her. They are not[73] in the habit of despising a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite because he suffers hunger. But [if] he is found, he will have to make a sevenfold restitution, he will have to give all the possessions of his house. He who commits adultery with a woman lacks sense, he who does so, is destroying his life. Beating and disgrace he will find, his dishonour will not be wiped out. Since jealousy [drives][74] the husband's anger,[75] he will be ruthless[76] in the day of revenge. He will not accept any satisfaction and will not consent no matter how big the gift. [Prov 6:23-35]

The passion with which the father admonishes the son here is striking; the only other occasions of such a passionate language are found in the admonitions to pursue Dame Wisdom. This strong rhetoric shows that this issue is perceived by the speaker as of the utmost importance.

Notably, the urgency with which the father speaks stems here from practical economic concerns rather than abstract morality. This is most obvious in the latter passage in the contrast between involvement with a prostitute and adultery. Both of these are perceived in negative terms, yet, the consequences of the latter are seen as much more serious, and it is against adultery that the passage is primarily aimed. The central issue here is not the morality of sexual intercourse outside of marriage, but rather the socio-economic impact of illicit sexual behaviour. Both passages speak of adultery as necessarily resulting in disgrace and destruction. The husband's resources are channelled to some other household, strangers take over and enjoy what he worked hard for. What is, however, even more interesting, is the imagery of spilled

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[72] Since a prostitute is not exactly synonymous with a wife of another man, I am inclined to agree with McKane (1970:329-30) and Toy (136-37) that the וְ is adversative here; the prostitute represents a serious threat, but the wife of another man spells total disaster. McKane prefers to render נֶפֶשׁ יְקָרָה as *man of means*, on the grounds that the resulting parallelism is better. However, one would expect אִישׁ rather than נֶפֶשׁ to be used in such a construction.

[73] Toy (139) emends to a positive statement, on the grounds that there is no sign of this sort of leniency in the OT and that the thief here is a man of property. Yet, property cannot always provide food, and there is no leniency in the formal treatment of the thief, only in human attitude to him (note the habitual use of Px throughout this verse — the text does not envisage a man who is momentarily hungry, but who suffers hunger as a chronic condition). McKane (1970:220) prefers to render the verse as a question, but this type of question is regularly introduced by הֲלֹא (e.g. Prov 8:1).

[74] Lit. *is*.

[75] Driver (1951b:177) proposes to read תחם for חֲמַת, but the versions attest to the construct and the text makes good sense as it stands.

[76] Lit. *not have compassion*.

water we find in the former text. There is little doubt that the well here is a metaphor for the wife, i.e., it is the wife's resources that are in some sense squandered, let out into the open, into the public domain. It is not entirely clear what hides behind this imagery in practical terms, although it is clear that both the husband and wife are seriously effected. While the sexual overtones of the imagery of giving out strength and spilled water are unmistakable, the reference here is to the entirety of the couple's being; what is dissolving and flowing out is not merely their sexual bond, but their entire existence. Adultery breaks apart the family framework and in Proverbs there is no prosperous life outside of it.

While the former passage relates the primary impact on the family of the adulterer, the latter passage also brings into the discussion the damage caused to the husband of the adulterous woman. The comparison with the hungry thief here illuminates the mechanism of the economic disaster depicted in the previous passage. Two major factors are involved in the adulterer's downfall. First, he, in contrast to the hungry thief, comes to be despised by the wider community, and second, the damage that he caused to the other man is perceived as so grievous, that in practical terms restitution cannot be made; the offended husband will pursue the other man to a complete destruction, with the tacit support of the community.

The concern about the impact of adultery and prostitution is not limited to the first nine chapters of the book, although it finds its most forcible formulation there. A similar perspective is found in the following sayings:

> My son, give me your mind, let your eyes guard[77] my ways. For a harlot[78] is a deep pit, and a foreign woman is a narrow well. Also, she is like[79] a robber lying in ambush, and she adds [to] the traitors among men. [Prov 23:26-28]
>
> A man who loves wisdom makes his father happy, but a companion of prostitutes squanders wealth. [Prov 29:3]
>
> So is the way of woman eating of adultery and wiping her mouth, and she says, I have not committed wickedness. [Prov 30:20]

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[77] Reading 𝔐 Q תִּצֹּרְנָה; K תִּרְצֶנָּה, *delight in*.

[78] 𝔐 זוֹנָה; 𝔊 ἀλλότριος, i.e., זָרָה (McKane 1970:390). Note, however, that in 𝔊 the topic is not a woman, but a house. Thus the whole verse has a rather different thrust.

[79] L כְּ many manuscripts בְּ. L is clearly the superior reading.

On the issue of marriage, it can be further observed that the expression אֵשֶׁת נְעוּרֶיךָ in Prov 5:18 accompanied by בְּכָל־עֵת and תָּמִיד in v. 19 implies that a marriage is a long-term relationship for which no endpoint is envisaged. A similar perspective is implied by several sayings portraying a marriage that is not satisfactory from the husband's point of view:

> A woman of valour is a crown of her husband, but like rot in one's bones is one who causes shame. [Prov 12:4]
>
> A foolish son is a destruction to his father, and a contentious wife is continuous dripping. [Prov 19:13][80]
>
> It is better to dwell in a desolate land, than [to have] a contentious wife and grief. [Prov 21:19]
>
> It is better to dwell in the corner of a roof, than [to have] a house in common[81] with a quarrelsome wife. [Prov 25:24]
>
> Continuous dripping[82] on a rainy day, and a quarrelsome wife are alike. [Prov 27:15]

All of these verses paint such a state of affairs as most undesirable, yet, they also imply permanency of such an arrangement; the concept of divorce seems to be foreign to Proverbs. This is notable since provision for divorce is made in, for instance, the legal OT traditions. This fact further underlines the importance that the stability of the family framework has for the proverbial world. Divorce undermines the coherence of the family and also of the broader community by causing damage to relationships between the wider families that are related through such terminated marriage. Further, since we have seen so far that the proverbial views concerning marriage are driven by economic concerns, it is more than likely that also the absence of divorce from Proverbs has its roots there, probably in matters of ownership of land.

Beyond the basic principles of juridical justice and family-centred ethics, Proverbs presents the reader with rather clearly defined work and business ethics.

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[80] For textual notes see p. 151.

[81] Albright's (1955:11) suggestion that וּבֵית חָבֶר means *brewery* is unconvincing, as the regular sense fits the context much better.

[82] For discussion of the verb טרד see Greenfield (1958:210-12).

While wisdom is portrayed in Proverbs as the ultimate source of wealth and success, this is not to be understood in some abstract manner. Wealth does not come through mere shrewdness or intellectual speculation, but through hard work. Thus, diligence is one of the prime proverbial virtues, while laziness is despised:

> The sluggard's appetite desires and nothing happens, but the soul of the diligent people will fatten. [Prov 13:4]
>
> Who is idle in his own business is a brother to one who destroys himself.[83] [Prov 18:9]

Furthermore, wisdom is not a guide as to how to get rich quickly. Rather, prosperity comes gradually as a result of persistent endeavour and skill; there are no shortcuts.

The emphasis on justice for others projects itself forcibly into the arena of commerce and related activities. The keys to success in life are skill and honesty, wealth which is acquired by dishonest means is only short lived:

> Do you see a man who is an expert in his trade? He will stand in front of kings, he will not stand before those who are unimportant.[84] [Prov 22:29]
>
> Quickly[85] made wealth will diminish, but he who gathers by handfuls, will increase it.[86] [Prov 13:11]
>
> Treasures accomplished[87] by a deceitful tongue — vapour driven among deadly snares.[88] [Prov 21:6]
>
> Bread of deceit is sweet to a man, but later he will have his mouth full of gravel. [Prov 20:17]
>
> An honest man, many blessings, but he who is hasty to make riches will not go unpunished. [Prov 28:20]
>
> False scales are an abomination to Yahweh, but an honest weight is his pleasure. [Prov 11:1]
>
> Just measures and scales[89] belong to Yahweh, all weights in the bag are his work. [Prov 16:11]

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[83] בַּעַל has a reflexive function here.

[84] Lit. *dark, obscure*. BHS proposes to delete the C colon, but tricolons are used in the book to indicate an end of a section, which is the case here.

[85] Reading with 𝔊(ט) מֶהֶבֶל in place 𝔐 מֵהֶבֶל; 𝔖 ܡܢ ܫܘܠ, *from wickedness*, i.e., מֵחֶבֶל. Both the 𝔖 and 𝔊 variants are plausible, the latter makes a better parallel with the B colon. Driver (1931:144) proposed to read מֵהֶבֶל, *got by scheming*, quoting Ps 62:11. However, the parallelism shows quite clearly that the root הֶבֶל has its normal sense of vanity in Ps 62:11.

[86] Disregarding the syntax indicated by the accents, which makes little sense.

[87] 𝔐 פֹּעַל, *work, working*, but I am inclined to follow the WTS parsing as Pu Sx 3ms. 𝔊 ὁ ἐνεργῶν, i.e., ptc.; 𝔖 ܕܡܬܥܒܕ, *working, operation*, reflects the 𝔐 pointing.

[88] L(𝔖) הֶבֶל נֹדֵף מְבַקְשֵׁי־מָוֶת, but some manuscripts וּמוֹקֵשׁ. 𝔊 μάταια διώκει ἐπὶ παγίδας θανάτου, *he pursues vanity upon a snare of death*, i.e., הֶבֶל רֹדֵף בְּמוֹקֵשׁ מָוֶת. I follow McKane (1970:243, 552) and transpose מ and ב.

> There is weight and weight, epha and epha, both of these are an abomination to Yahweh. [Prov 20:10]
>
> Differing weights are an abomination to Yahweh, and cheating scales are not good. [Prov 20:23]
>
> A wicked deputy falls on account of evil, but a faithful envoy is healing. [Prov 13:17]

It becomes apparent from these sayings that while success and prosperity are the aim and the driving force behind the proverbial wisdom, the ethical ideal is more important to the sages than these. The following proverb expresses it in the clearest of terms:

> Better is little in righteousness than great produce in injustice. [Prov 16:8]

In addition to open dishonesty, such as short measures, certain other business practices are perceived as unethical in Proverbs. These include speculation with food and charging interest:

> People curse a person who withholds grain, but there is blessing for the head of one who sells. [Prov 11:26]
>
> He who amasses wealth through interest and usury, gathers it for someone else, one gracious to the poor. [Prov 28:8]

Further, under the category of work ethics falls the responsibility to pay due attention to livestock:

> A righteous person knows the needs[90] of his animal, but the bowels of wicked people are cruel. [Prov 12:10]

This is not just a piece of practical advice on farming, but rather it is an extension of the ethical considerations beyond the confines of inter-human relationships, and fits in with the observation made earlier concerning the coherence of the proverbial world and the applicability of the divine order to it in its entirety.

One other issue that belongs under the ethics category is that of using bribes. This is an area where the sages' views are somewhat ambiguous. Sometimes a bribe appears as a useful tool, sometimes it is condemned. For McKane (1970:18) this is

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[89] While usually a construct chain with a multiple head has the rectum following the first head element, exceptions are found in poetry (WOC 9.3b), as is quite clearly the case here.

[90] The Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ encapsulates the tangible experience of life.

one of the indications that the early wisdom was secular without ethical concerns, thus approving of bribes, while only in the later wisdom the attitude has changed. However, there is another possible explanation of this seeming tension. It can be observed that bribery is condemned only where it is intended to manipulate the process of justice. On the occasions where the view of it seems to be positive, it is used to other ends, such as to improve one's social standing, or to pacify an enemy:

> A wicked person takes a gift under the table,[91] in order to stretch justice. [Prov 17:23]
>
> A man's gift makes room for him, it lets him rest before the great. [Prov 18:16]
>
> A gift in concealment covers anger, and a present under the table[92] [covers][93] a great rage. [Prov 21:14]

It is, therefore, possible, that these verses do not witness to a diachronic change in an attitude, but rather to an ethical perspective on use of gifts different than that of the modern western society. That this is likely is confirmed by the conformity of this attitude to the basic tenets of the proverbial ethics, upholding of justice and promoting of harmonious relationships. A gift as a means of perverting justice is unacceptable, but a gift as a means of building and strengthening relationships with others is not only legitimate, but also desirable.

Wisdom of Qoheleth

Fundamentals of Qoheleth's Wisdom

It is quite easy to overlook the fact that Qoheleth's aim is at least in principle very much the same as that of the proverbial sages; they are all interested in the question of how to make the most of life. I have argued in chapter 3 that in Qoheleth's world everything happens in mutually annulling pairs, and it is for this reason that no genuine gain can be made. However, I have also pointed out that the

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[91] Lit. *from lap*.
[92] Lit. *in the lap*.
[93] 𝔊 took this as antithetical (Toy 404), construing the B colon as a nominal sentence, but it is quite clear that the two lines are synonymous with the verb being gapped in the B colon.

paired events are not synchronic, i.e., there are temporary situations of gain, as well as temporary situations of loss. The occurrences and disappearances of these states do not happen according to any predictable pattern, they are governed by chance:

> And again I saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor is favour to the knowledgeable, for time and chance[94] may happen to[95] all of them. For man also does not know his time: like fish that are caught in an evil net, and like birds caught in the snare, so human beings are trapped[96] at an evil time as it suddenly falls upon them. [Qoh 9:11-12]

Because human effort and insight cannot predict and/or control changing fortune, the only hope of getting something positive out of life lies in fully exploiting the good times while coping with the bad times. It is within this context that Qoheleth understands wisdom:

> And I saw that wisdom has an advantage over stupidity, like the advantage of the light over the darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness. But I also came to know that the same chance happens to both of them. [Qoh 2:13-14][97]

> And I said: 'Wisdom is better than strength, but wisdom of a poor person is despised, his words are not listened to.' The quiet words[98] of the wise are to be listened to more than the lamentation[99] of a ruler over fools. Wisdom is better than weapons, but one sinner destroys much good. Dead flies[100] cause a cup[101] of aromatic[102] oil to stink, and a little folly abounds[103] over wisdom. [Qoh 9:16-10:1]

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[94] Fox (1989:260) sees here a hendiadys, *time of accident*, but in the light of the very particular sense of עֵת in Qoh 3:1-9 discussed earlier the וְ is better seen as a regular copula.

[95] For the same syntax of קרה אֶת־ see Qoh 2:14.

[96] יוּקָשִׁים is an unusual form, possibly an old form of Qal pass. ptc., or Pu ptc. that lost the מ prefix through haplography.

[97] For textual notes see p. 162.

[98] Lit. *words in quietness*, which is parallel to *shout* in the B colon.

[99] זְעָקָה is always used of a cry under adverse circumstances as Ogden (1987b:162) pointed out, although his assertion that it is specifically a cry for help is not justified (cf. Esth 4:3).

[100] Lit. *flies of death*, an attributive genitive, cf. 𝔖; Fox (1989:264-5) suggests re-dividing the consonants זבוב ימות rendering *a fly dies and spoils* …, but that is unnecessary.

[101] Reading גְּבִיעַ, *cup*, with 𝔖; 𝔊 σκευασία, *dressing*; יְבִיעַ is omitted by σ', 𝔗, 𝔙. This could indicate dittography with יֶבְאַישׁ, but in the light of 𝔖 and 𝔊, it is more probable that the omission is due to the difficulties with the understanding of the word.

[102] Reading with 𝔊 ἡδύσματος, *spicy*, i.e., רֹקַח (cf. 𝔖 ܒܘܫܡܐ, *pleasant, sweet*); 𝔐 רוֹקֵחַ.

[103] Emending 𝔐 מְכָבּוֹד to מַכְבִּיד, cf. BHS. This is the easiest way to supply a contextually meaningful verb to the clause. It is not necessary to emend further to create a feminine form of the ptc, since a masculine form of a verb is not unusual when the feminine subject follows it (see Joü §150b and also note 110 on p. 122).

Wisdom has some relative, but no absolute, value; it has a potential but this potential can be easily thwarted. Consequently, *wisdom* means something quite different in Qoheleth than it does in Proverbs. The proverbial sages aspired to excellence and wisdom was ultimately a perfect tool producing impeccable results if adopted wholeheartedly. In contrast, for Qoheleth wisdom is a tool that can only improve one's odds and even that cannot be guaranteed.

What then are the practical aspects of Qoheleth's wisdom? The most noticeable element of it is the call to enjoy life repeated throughout the book. It finds its fullest expression in the following passage:

> Go! Eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine in enjoyment of heart, for God has already paid off[104] your deeds. Let your clothes always be white, and may there not be shortage of oil upon you head. Enjoy life with a woman whom you love all the days of your futile existence, which[105] he gave to you under the sun, all your futile days, for that is your share in life, and in the work which you carry out under the sun. Whatever you may be able to[106] do, do it with your vigour,[107] for there is no deed or devising or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, where you are [already][108] going. [Qoh 9:7-10]

Qoheleth's emphasis on enjoyment has often been understood as hedonistic, advocating a superficial *carpe diem* approach to life, in which only the present matters, and the future should be ignored. Yet, it is my opinion, that the intention of these calls, and the real nature of the attitude from which they spring, is rather different. First of all, the reference to eating and drinking cannot be taken in a limited literary manner, and even less so as an encouragement of a lazy lifestyle. What Qoheleth has in mind is not a life of idleness and orgies, but rather the phrase *eat and drink* represents personal satisfaction in a broader sense, and what is most important,

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[104] I am taking this as רצה II, *to pay off, restitute* [e.g. Lev 26:41, 43], as this makes good sense in the context where the enjoyment is the only reward for one's work. However, the context does not make reading רצה I impossible (cf. KBL^3).

[105] אֲשֶׁר understood as referring to *days of your futile existence*. Against understanding אִשָּׁה as the referent (Ogden 1987b:153) speaks the presence of the qualifying *under the sun*, and the epexegetical repetition *all your futile days*.

[106] Hebrew *your hand may find/reach*, used here idiomatically.

[107] I follow 𝔊 understanding בְּכֹחֲךָ as an adverbial modifier for עֲשֵׂה, *pace* 𝔐 accentuation, which links it with עֲשׂוֹת. This appears to be a slightly better reading, as בְּכֹחֲךָ conveys a notion that is already implicitly present in the idiom מָצָא + יָד.

[108] The ptc underlines that this is an activity that is presently underway.

one that comes as the result of work. This is made quite clear in v. 10: the call to enjoyment is a call to act, to apply intelligence, knowledge and wisdom, and then to enjoy what comes out as a result of such an activity, providing anything does. The satisfaction derived from one's endeavour is the best one can hope for, it is the best that life can offer.

That Qoheleth's attitude is not that of a carefree hedonism is further shown by the material in the book that encourages the contemplation of more serious and less enjoyable matters:

> It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting because that is the end of every man, and the living one should ponder [it]. Sadness is better than laughter, for when the face is distressed, the mind will be well. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of joy. [Qoh 7:2-4][109]

> The light is sweet and it is pleasant for eyes to see the sun. Indeed, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in all of them, but let him remember the dark days, for they could be may, all that comes is futile. Young man, rejoice in your youth, and let your heart make you happy in your young days, and walk in the ways of your heart,[110] and[111] visions of your eyes, but[112] know that concerning[113] all of these God will bring you into judgement. Remove anger[114] from your heart, make evil pass away from your body, for youth and <prime of life>[115] are futile. And remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the bad days come, and years will approach when you say: 'I have no pleasure in them.' [Qoh 11:7-12:1]

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[109] For textual notes see p. 165.

[110] Some 𝔊 manuscripts + ἀμωμος, *blamelessly*; this is almost certainly an intentional addition narrowing the scope of possible interpretation.

[111] Some 𝔊 manuscripts + μη; see the note above.

[112] Gordis (1955a:336) objects to the adversative rendering of this ו, but it is not really clear what difference his rendering *and know that for all of these ...* makes.

[113] It is possible to argue that עַל should be rendered *in spite of* (this would appear to be the sense of עַל in Job 10:5 and Isa 59:3; the rest of the examples in BDB are questionable) on the grounds that enjoyment is presented here as God's will and therefore the youth cannot be judged for it. The sense then would be that the possibility to enjoy life in itself does not guarantee that one is blameless before God.

[114] In the light of the parallelism with רָעָה this would appear to be a more appropriate rendering for כַּעַס than *anxiety*.

[115] The Hebrew שְׁחָרוּת is obscure, but the overall sense seems clear. Gordis (1955a:337) points out possibly related Arabic *šariḥ*, *youth*, but I find more plausible Ibn Ezra's explanation that the word has been coined from שַׁחַר, *dawn*, and formed along the same pattern as יַלְדוּת (see Rottzoll 1999:236-37).

The emphasis on enjoying the product of one's work is only a particular example of a more general principle that characterises Qoheleth's wisdom, that of seizing the day. More light is thrown on this issue by the advice of the concluding part of the book:

> If the clouds are full of water, it keeps[116] raining upon the land, and whether a tree[117] may fall to the south, or to the north, as for the place where the tree may fall — there it will be. He who watches for wind, may never sow, and he who observes the clouds may never harvest. Just as[118] you do not know what the path of the breath [is] in[119] the bones in the womb of a pregnant [woman],[120] so you cannot know the deed of God who always does[121] all these. In the morning sow your seed, and do not rest your hand until[122] the evening, for you do not know, which of these will succeed, this or that, or whether both of them will be equally good. [Qoh 11:3-7]

Qoheleth is not just concerned that one seizes the opportunity to enjoy oneself, but more generally, that one seizes the moment for anything one may be doing. This principle of grasping the opportunity is derived from considerations about what the future holds, and there is nothing superficial about it. Qoheleth's world offers only limited windows of opportunity. Conditions and ability to carry something out come and go; the singular certainty in life is that anything positive will come to an end, while at the same time any change of conditions for the better cannot be guaranteed.

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[116] Habitual use of Px.

[117] Barton (1912:182-3) thinks that עֵץ in v. 3 refers to a divination stick tossed in the air on the basis of Hos 4:12. However, it is not at all implied by Hos 4:12, that the talk is about a stick tossed into the air, and furthermore, the nature-imagery of the A colon suggests a similar sense for the B colon.

[118] 𝔊, α' appear to be reading בַּאֲשֶׁר, but 𝔐 fits better the syntax of the verse (כְּמָה ... כַּאֲשֶׁר).

[119] Reading with many manuscripts and 𝔗 בְּ instead of כְּ found in L.

[120] There are several ways of reading the second half of the first colon. הַמְלֵאָה can either form a construct chain with בִּבֶטֶן, i.e., *in the womb of a pregnant woman*, or, after slight repointing, it could be an attributive modifier for בַּבֶּטֶן, i.e., *the pregnant womb*, it could further be an attributive modifier for הָרוּחַ, *the filling spirit*. The vocalisation speaks against the second option, while the accentuation supports the first interpretation in which case the main verb in the clause is gapped. Irrespective of the preferred interpretation, the overall sense is similar.

[121] Habitual use of Px. It would be possible to render the verb as modal, *who may do anything*, which would fit the preceding verses, but in the immediate context the habitual interpretation is better since the unknowability, and therefore, unpredictability, of divine action has been already asserted in what directly precedes.

[122] Terminative temporal use of ל, cf. Exod 34:2; Deutt 16:4 (see WOC 11.2.10c). Crenshaw (1988:181) and Fox (1989:276) prefer to render *in*, in the light of the following *this or that*, but this phrase is better understood as referring to the multiplicity of the seeds rather than morning and evening.

The way to overcome this is to know at any time what one can realistically accomplish and carry it out while it is possible.

However, such an approach is not without potential pitfalls, precisely because one is never certain what will come next. It is important to grasp that Qoheleth does not advise ignoring this uncertainty. Rather, one has to know the potential problems and be prepared to take a calculated risk. This element is expressed by the contrast between vv. 3 and 4. There are some problematic situations that are obvious. If the sky is covered in clouds pregnant with rain, then it will rain and one has to adjust the farming activity accordingly, and a tree that has fallen is not going to move itself. On the other hand the farmer who waits for ideal conditions for sowing or worries too much whether the weather may not adversely change in the near future, affecting his harvest, may never grow or harvest anything. A balance needs to be struck between avoiding the risk and missing the chance.

It should be further observed that Qoheleth's advice is not simply to take the risk, but also to organise one's business in such a manner as to minimise the potential mishaps. The farmer who cannot be certain that the conditions are entirely satisfactory to allow his sowing to succeed must make a double effort to beat the odds; life is not about taking what comes when it comes, but about being prepared for what may come. This perspective is behind the initial verses of Qoh 11:

> Send[123] your bread upon waters, for in many days you may find it. Give portion to seven, and even to eight, for you do not know what evil may come upon the land. [Qoh 11:1]

The precise meaning of these lines, and in particular of v. 1 has been disputed.[124] However, what remains quite clear, irrespective of the details, is the fact that these

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[123] The image is of placing bread upon water, not throwing it into it (Fox 1989:275).

[124] There are two common lines of interpretation: (1) These are commercial metaphors, v. 1 refers to investing into overseas trade, v. 2 has a similar meaning as the English *do not keep all your eggs in one basket*; (2) these verses have charitable actions in mind. Both of these approaches have their stronger and weaker points. In the former case, the thematic link with what follows is obvious. The objection has been made that v. 1 can hardly refer to investment since in such a case one would expect a greater return than the principal investment (e.g. Fox 1989:273-5), but the basic theme of the unit is not how to make a profit, but how to limit losses, and moving a portion of one's property abroad

Continued on the following page

verses encourage an attitude of foresight in one's life, they are about considering what the future may bring and taking steps to be prepared. This ability to assess risk and be prepared accordingly is, alongside the *seize the day* principle, the second critical part of what Qoheleth perceives as wisdom. To express it differently, Qoheleth's wisdom is not deterministic, as the wisdom of the proverbial sages is, but probabilistic. It is about relating the present to the possible future in a probable way, and yet, being prepared for the unforeseen.

This character of Qoheleth's wisdom is further seen in the following series of proverbs:

> He who digs a pit, may fall[125] into it, and he who breaks through a stone wall may be bitten by a snake. He who quarries stones, may be hurt by them, [126]he who splits trees, may be endangered[127] by them.
>
> When someone has blunted the axe[128] and he does not sharpen[129] [it] first,[130] then one will have to exert strength repeatedly,[131] but wisdom makes advantage possible.[132]

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serves as an insurance against localised crisis. At the same time, it is questionable that the imagery of casting bread on water, an activity with little obvious purpose, and little predictable outcome, can serve as a metaphor for a purpose-conscious business strategy. As for the latter line of interpretation, its main weakness is the fact that the following verses are not really concerned with charity as such, and Qoheleth's previous conclusions were that righteousness (within which charitable actions fall) does not make any material difference to a person's life. At the same time, the language of casting into water in connection with charitable behaviour is found in Ptahotep 333-49, and the Instruction of Onchsheshonqy 19.1.10 (Fox 1989:273-5; Gemser 1960:126). Further, v. 1 resembles an Arabic proverb with charity in mind, although there is a chance that it might be dependent on our text (Barton 1912:112; Ogden 1987b:184). In my view the precise meaning cannot be satisfactorily determined at present.

[125] The Px used in v. 8 & 9 expresses potential, not certainty, i.e., the proverb is not the same as the English 'who digs a pit falls into it' — the gnomic notion is typical expressed by Sx in BH (see WOC 30.5.1c).

[126] Many manuscripts, S, ט + *and.*

[127] The sense of סכן in MH (see JAS), cf. 𝔊 κινδυνευσει, *will take risk (with them).* S ܟܟܠ, *to become weary, tired.* The overall sense is clear from the parallelism.

[128] As Schoors (155) pointed out Pi is rarely intransitive, it is therefore best to take the subject as unspecified, referred to by הוּא in the following clause. Fox (1989:268) argues that the antecedent for הוּא is the man from v. 9, but vv. 8-11 seem to contain proverbs that make a similar point, but are otherwise unrelated.

[129] Some oriental manuscripts read לוֹ instead of לֹא of L. S, 𝔊 do not have an explicit negative, but neither reflects לוֹ, and in both cases negative is implied by the verb (S ܗܠܩ, *to trouble*; 𝔊 ταρράσειν, *to stir*); ט follows 𝔐. קלל is difficult, I follow here KBL[3].

[130] I follow here Seow (1997:317) who understands פָּנִים adverbially; others prefer to emend to לפנים, e.g. Driver's (1954:232), Gordis (1955a:322-3).

[131] The plural here probably denotes repeated action, or intensity (see WOC 7.4.2c).

> If the snake bites before[133] the snake-charming, then the enchanter[134] brings no advantage.[135] [Qoh 10:8-11]

Wisdom is about knowing the risks, using intelligence rather than brute force and avoiding potential problems, rather than solving them; it makes little difference whether one can charm a snake to stop it from biting or not when the snake has bitten already. What matters is not only the possession of a skill, but also its deployment at the proper time. The ability to combine these, i.e., knowledge and timing, is wisdom:

> … the heart of the wise man knows time and procedure. Indeed, for every matter there is a time and a procedure … [Qoh 8:5-6][136]

While the probabilistic nature of Qoheleth's approach is rather different from the deterministic wisdom of the proverbial sages, some aspects of Qoheleth's approach to life are remarkably similar to theirs. In general, in spite of the severe limits of wisdom, Qoheleth abhors the fool and his conduct:

> It is better to hear the rebuke of a wise man, than [when] one is listening to the song of fools. For like the sound of thorns under the pot, so is laughter of the fool. And this also is futile. For[137] oppression[138] will make the wise foolish and a gift[139] corrupts[140] the heart. [Qoh 7:5-7]

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[132] The B colon is difficult, and its interpretation depends both on the reading adopted (𝔐 K הכשיר / 𝔐 Q הכשר / 𝔖 הכשרי; note that there is no Q in L) and the parsing of that reading — the Q can be understood as 3ms Hiphil Sx, Hiphil infc. cs., Hiphil infa. abs, a determined sg. noun or a determined pl. cs. noun. In the context of the disadvantage caused by the axe's bluntness, the expected sense is that wisdom produces advantage. Thus it appears best to read הכשר and parse as Hiphil infa. in the sense *to enable, to prepare ground for* (see JAS), with wisdom being the subject, i.e., *wisdom makes advantage possible*. Gordis (1955a:323) reads K in the sense *to prepare*, rendering the B colon: *it is an advantage to prepare one's skill beforehand*, but it is unlikely that wisdom, irrespective of what kind of wisdom, would be spoken of in the sense of preparing it; for wisdom is acquired through long-term training and experience, it is a state of being, not a routine to be carried out. Fox (1989:268) is reading הַכְשֵׁר in light of Aramaic כַּשְׁרָא, *the skilled man*, which finds some support in 𝔊 τοῦ ἀνδρείου σοφία, although it should be noted that σοφία is not rendering הכשיר but translates חָכְמָה.

[133] I follow Ogden (1987b:171).

[134] Idiomatic use of בַּעַל denoting occupation. The significance of eloquent speech for enchanting can be seen in Ps 58:6 (Barton 1912:177).

[135] Lit. *the enchanter has no advantage.* Crenshaw (1988:173) observes the phonetic qualities of the verse, note in particular the repeated occurrence of שׁ.

[136] For textual notes see p. 209.

[137] Schoors (1981) understands the כִּי as purely emphatic, but there is a clear logical relationship with the previous verse.

[138] 𝔐 עֹשֶׁק; 𝔊 συκοφαντία, *slander*, but the root can have the overtones of extortion, see L&S; 𝔖 ܫܘܝܩܐ, *slander*, but note that this could be an internal Syriac error (or correction toward 𝔊) from ܥܘܫܩܐ, *oppression*. Driver (1954:229-30) proposes the existence of root עשׁק II, *to slander*, on

Continued on the following page

Yet, the demarcation line between the fools and wise is very thin and fragile; the clear-cut and tangible division of people into the two camps so familiar from Proverbs is nowhere to be seen, for in Qoheleth's experience it takes relatively little to turn a wise man into a fool.

It was also noted earlier that the enjoyment that Qoheleth encourages stems from work. It is, therefore, not too surprising that Qoheleth also shares the proverbial view that laziness is self-destructive:

> In sluggishness the beam-work will be collapsing and in lowering of hands the house will be leaking. [Qoh 10:18][141]

Further, Qoheleth shares with the proverbial sages the attitude toward speech, its power and the negative impact of garrulity:

> The words of the mouth of a wise man are grace[ful], but the lips of a fool engulf him.[142] The beginning of the words of his mouth are folly and the end of his mouth is bad madness. But the fool multiplies words; [143]one[144] does not know what will[145] come [next] and what will be afterwards.[146] Who can tell him? [Qoh 10:12-14]

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the basis of the versions and Aramaic. Admittedly such a rendering fits the context well but the evidence of the versions is questionable and the internal evidence for such a root in Hebrew is lacking.

[139] 𝔐 מַתְנָה; not present in 𝔊 but attested by 𝔖. Driver (1954:229-30) proposes to derive מַתְנָה from מתן, with the ה possibly being a personal suffix, rendering *and it destroys a/his stout heart*, but attestation of this root in Hebrew is dubious.

[140] 𝔐 וְיֹאבֵד; 4QQoh[a] יעוה, from עוה *to be guilty* (Qal), *to pervert* (Pi), which might reflect an audible error. The gender disagreement is most likely due to the separation of the verb from the subject by the object; see note 110 on p. 122.

[141] For textual notes see p. 170.

[142] The suffix is ambiguous, and could refer to the fool, the wise person, or the graceful words of the wise. The latter option (e.g. Ogden 1987b:173) seems least likely, since, as the following verse indicates, the concern here is with what comes out of the fool's mouth. The middle option cannot be completely ruled out, but the proposed reading best fits the context, which does not appear to be concerned with the fool's impact on others, but rather on himself.

[143] Many manuscripts + ו. The B colon is best taken as yet another comment by Qoheleth on the fool; it is unlikely that it should be understood as direct speech uttered by the fool concerning the general state of things, because such a comment has been previously made by Qoheleth himself, and Qoheleth emphatically denies being a fool.

[144] הָאָדָם is unlikely to denote species here, i.e., mankind. It is also unlikely that it refers to the fool himself (in such a case no noun would have been necessary), thus it is probably referring to the man that serves the fool as an audience.

[145] L מַה־שֶּׁיִּהְיֶה; a few manuscripts, 𝔊, 𝔖 appear to read מַה־שֶּׁהָיָה, but this could only be an interpretative move under the influence of the past-future passages elsewhere in the book. 𝔐 is preferable in the immediate context.

[146] Gordis (1955a:324) *after his lifetime*, but that does not fit the context very well, since the B colon appears to be a comment concerning the fool's speech.

The advice that Qoheleth offers is general and conceptual rather than specific, even the verses quoted above from Qoh 11 that talk about the farmer are clearly not aimed at the farmer *per se* but are illustrations. There is only one group of guidelines that are context-specific. I suggested in the previous chapter that the monarchy was an intimate reality for Qoheleth, and this is expressed in instructions for those who interact with the king:

> Watch the mouth[147] of the king and concerning a divine oath, do not be hasty.[148] Walk from his presence, [149]do not stand in an evil thing, for he does whatever he pleases. Because[150] the word of the king is powerful, and who will say to him: 'What are you doing?'. Who keeps a command, will not know any evil thing, and the heart of wise man[151] knows time and[152] judgement. [Qoh 8:2-5]
>
> If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness[153] can appease great sins. [Qoh 10:4]
>
> ... not even in your thought curse the king, and do not curse the rich in your bedroom, for a bird from heaven will carry your voice and a winged creature will disclose [your] word. [Qoh 10:20][154]

Interestingly enough, this advice has nothing to do with the factual aspects of the court, it has no partisan slant (in the political sense), and reveals nothing of what the courtier's duties would have been and how they should or might have been approached. Nor does it show how to exploit one's position at the court to one's benefit. Instead, what Qoheleth offers are simple guidelines on how to survive being a courtier. The key to this is unquestionable loyalty; the kings Qoheleth knew

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[147] Reading with versions אֶת־ instead of 𝔐 אֲנִי. Gordis (1955a:287) proposes that אֲנִי should be understood as standing for *I declare*. This is possible, but the resulting sense is virtually identical to that of the versions.

[148] Ending the clause with 𝔊, σ', 𝔖 after תִּבָּהֵל in v. 3. This is necessary due to the presence of the ו (attested both in 𝔐 and versions) before עַל דִּבְרַת indicating that עַל דִּבְרַת שְׁבוּעַת אֱלֹהִים does not modify what precedes, thus requiring its own independent clause.

[149] Many manuscripts, 𝔖, 𝔗 + וְ. This was probably supplied by the versions in an attempt to clarify the syntax of the verse which in 𝔐 has three uncoordinated verbs.

[150] 𝔊(𝔖) כַּאֲשֶׁר, in place of 𝔐 בַּאֲשֶׁר but 𝔐 fits the context better.

[151] Possibly *wise heart* (so Crenshaw 1988:151).

[152] Several manuscripts and 𝔊 omit the copula, i.e., *time of judgement*, but 𝔏 is preferable in the light of v. 6.

[153] So KBL[2] for מַרְפֵּא here and in Prov 14:30; 15:4. Although this sense is unlikely in Prov 14:30, the use of the verb רפה in Judg 8:3 suggests that this meaning is within the semantic range of the root, in spite of the fact that there is no evidence that the word was so used in MH (Barton 1912:176). Fox's (1989:266) rendering *ability to soothe anger* would seem to capture the thrust of the verse.

[154] For textual notes see p. 170.

tolerated no dissent. Such loyalty needed to be accompanied by shrewdness, understanding what would be acceptable at any given moment (which is just a variant on the basic concept of wisdom as skill and timing). But even the loyal and shrewd courtier could not obviously avoid the king's anger, those who wished to stay alive needed to be able to face the king calmly and appease the royal rage.

In face of the fact that these texts contain very little of any deeper insight, in contrast to the profundity of Qoheleth's comments elsewhere, it is hard to avoid the impression that Qoheleth did not consider being close to the king as something that one should desire and pursue. While in Proverbs skill and mastery bring one in front of the king, there appears to be little space for real wisdom at the court of Qoheleth's world, where fools can be easily placed in positions of power. It can be concluded from this that while the sages of Qoheleth's time played a role at the court, it was not the court and their place at it that gave them their identity; the sage would have been used as a political advisor, but Qoheleth is far from equating the sage with a politician and wisdom with political science.

The Place of God and Ethics in Qoheleth's Wisdom

In the above rehearsal of the key elements of Qoheleth's wisdom, nothing has been said of God and/or ethical considerations. In Proverbs these two were inseparably linked and encapsulated in the hallmark phrase of proverbial wisdom, *fear of Yahweh*. This phrase *per se* is missing from Qoheleth, yet, he speaks of fearing God on four separate occasions [Qoh 3:14; 5:6; 7:18; 8:12-13]. He means by this an acknowledgement of the qualitatively different planes on which God and humanity operate and acceptance of the divine superiority. The resulting attitude is that of respect, which means refraining from attempts to manipulate and/or deceive the deity. Thus Qoheleth urges the reader to avoid false and void religiosity, such as making religious commitments that one cannot, or does not intend, to keep, or offering sacrifices that are a mere cover for disregard of God; Qoheleth's God

favours obedience over sacrifice. In spite of the fact that Qoheleth spends only limited space addressing the question of how humans should relate to God (he is much more interested in how God relates to humans), his religious attitude is not tokenistic. While the motivation for fearing God in the book is avoidance of his wrath, i.e., the attitude is that of 'playing it safe', it is obvious that this requires a genuine attitude — religious tokenism is a mark of fools.

Qoheleth perceives a link between fearing God and avoidance of evil, but this is much weaker than in Proverbs, and in general ethical considerations play only a very limited role in the book. The reason for this is concisely summarised in the following passage:

> Since the sentence of the evil deed is not carried out quickly, therefore the heart of sons of man is full within them to do evil — because a sinner does evil a hundred [times], yet, his [life] is prolonged — although I know that it should be well with the fearers of God, those who keep fearing before him. And it should not be well with the wicked, and [his] days should not be prolonged like a shadow, because he did not fear before God. There is futility which is done upon the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens as if they were wicked and there are wicked men, to whom it happens as if they were righteous. I said that also this is futile. [Qoh 8:11-14][155]

Whether one is righteous or wicked does not, in Qoheleth's experience, make any noticeable difference to one's quality of life. Therefore, ethics does not enter into the equation he is seeking a solution to. Yet, it would be misleading to say that Qoheleth does not care about ethical issues, or that he advocates situation ethics. The book is not about ethics, but neither does it seeks to legitimise behaviour without ethical norms. It is evident from the above quoted passage that Qoheleth had a clear concept of good and evil. He implied that wickedness deserves to be punished, although it is not, suggesting that he did not see wickedness as an acceptable way of life. A further necessary implication of the above text is that Qoheleth understands good and evil as notions that are clearly and universally defined, yet, their definition does not originate unequivocally in the divine activity as it did in Proverbs. Unfortunately, Qoheleth does not explain where he got these notions from, but considering that his

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[155] For textual notes see p. 77.

whole understanding of the world is anthropocentric, it is likely that good is that which when viewed through human eyes benefits human beings, and evil is that which is harmful to them.

The following passage is also of considerable interest for the question of Qoheleth's attitude toward ethical issues:

> Both[156] these I saw during the days of my futility: there is a righteous [person] who perishes in his righteousness and there is this wicked [person] who prolongs his days in his evil. Do not overdo it as a righteous person,[157] and do not conduct yourself wisely[158] beyond a measure, why should you ruin[159] yourself? Do not behave exceedingly wickedly, and do not be foolish, why die of unnatural causes?[160] It would be good if your hand lays hold of this, and does not let go of that, for one who fears God will go out[161] with both[162] of them. Wisdom is more powerful[163] to the wise than ten rulers,[164] who are in the city. Surely, there is no righteous man in the land, who would do what is good, and would not sin. [Qoh 7:15-20]

This text has been often interpreted as a formulation of the golden mean rule: be a little righteous and a little wicked, a little wise and a little foolish — everything in moderation.[165] I am not convinced that this is the correct understanding of the passage. The זֶה - זֶה construction of v. 18 suggests that in vv. 16-17, Qoheleth has only two types of activity in mind and that there is a semantic redundancy present

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[156] 𝔐 אֶת־הַכֹּל; as the rest of the verse indicates, the author has two realities in mind (Fox 1989:233).

[157] Whybray (1978) proposes to interpret the periphrastic construction *do not be self-righteous*, but there is no indication that the righteous in the preceding verse is only a would-be one. Ogden (1987b:115) suggests that הַרְבֵּה modifies the verb and not the adjective צַדִּיק, but the adjective cannot be separated from the auxiliary verb in a periphrastic construction.

[158] This appears to be a benefactive reflexive use of Hithpael (WOC 26.2e), similar to Exod 1:10.

[159] Px Hithpael with apocopated ת. Fox (1989:235) renders *why should you be shocked*, because wisdom is not a source of physical destruction. However, the surrounding context is explicitly concerned with destruction.

[160] Lit. *when it is not your time*.

[161] 𝔐 supported by 𝔊. 𝔖 ܢܛܦ, *to cling to*, but this appears to be an internal 𝔖 error from ܢܦܩ, *to go out*. Delitzsch (326) points out a MH idiom, where יצא means *to satisfy one's duty*.

[162] כָּל should not be translated *all* because as *this and that* in 18A indicates, Qoheleth has two things in mind.

[163] 𝔐 תָּעֹז; 4QQoh[a], 𝔊 תעזר; either could be the result of a simple scribal error. 𝔐 is the more difficult reading, as the verb is intransitive, but it could have the sense, *the wise [considers] wisdom more powerful*... Also 𝔐 reading fits well the parallel with the B colon (*power : rulers*), the association of rulers with help is not really obvious. Fox (1989:232) points out that עזז can be used as a synonym of עזר.

[164] Fox (1989:232) suggests to re-divide the consonants מעשר השליטם, *riches of the rulers*, but in the lack of textual evidence 𝔐, which is not obscure on this point, is preferable.

[165] For a comprehensive survey of approaches to interpreting this passage see Brindle (1985).

among the four imperatives. The golden mean proponents take this as a reference to the two verses respectively, each setting a limit on one side of the golden mean. Yet, this is unlikely. While these verses together display a carefully constructed semantic and syntactic chiasm, each one of them is constructed in an asymmetrical manner, which makes it impossible to understand the two colons within each verse as synonymous, and, thus, to see them as a single command expressed twofold. Also, I have already pointed out that wisdom and righteousness are not synonymous in Qoheleth in the way they are in Proverbs, and this fact further undermines such an understanding of v. 16. In addition, the passage quoted previously [Qoh 8:11-15] shows that Qoheleth considers being wicked as an equivalent to not fearing God, making it most unlikely that those who fear God aspire in his view to a little wickedness alongside of a little righteousness. In my view the synonymity, needed to reduce the redundancy of the four commands into two notions, is not to be found within the individual verses, but between them; v. 17 is a negatively formulated expression of the same notion as found in v. 16, and v. 18 then refers to the two separate commands in v. 16 (and their negated equivalents in v. 17).

A closer scrutiny of the text supports such an understanding. The A colons use as a modifier of the commands הַרְבֵּה (Qoheleth's basic word for much/many and antonym to מְעַט), but 16B uses יוֹתֵר (a term which denotes excess beyond a limit[166]), and the command in 17B has no qualifier at all. Thus rather than suggesting be a little wise and a little foolish, Qoheleth's bias expressed by the B colons is unequivocally toward wisdom; behave wisely up to a point (the value of wisdom is never unlimited in the book), but do not be a fool at all. Further, it can be observed that colons 16B and 17A use simple verbal constructions אַל־תִּתְחַכַּם / אַל־תִּרְשַׁע, but 16A and 17B use periphrastic constructions אַל־תְּהִי צַדִּיק / אַל־תְּהִי סָכָל. The main difference between these two types of clause is that the former refers to a person's conduct, the latter to a person's identity; the two תְּהִי constructions describe the primary identity of the person who follows Qoheleth's advice, a righteous person

[166] The semantic difference between the הַרְבֵּה and יוֹתֵר can be seen, for instance, in Qoh 12:12.

who is not a fool. The qualifier in 16A captures the fact that no person has the potential to be perfect, the righteous identity Qoheleth has in mind is from this world, not an absolute ideal. What he means is explicated by 17A, and amounts to not behaving excessively wickedly. This has to be understood in the context of the observation made in the previous chapter that in Qoheleth's world human beings have a natural tendency to be wicked. Therefore, Qoheleth is calling for consciously curtailing this tendency, rather than allowing oneself a degree of wickedness. That it is wisdom and a realistic degree of righteousness Qoheleth has in mind in v. 18 is affirmed by vv. 19-20, further elaborating on the value of wisdom, and limits that there are to human righteousness.[167] These two qualities are to be held onto in spite of the limited capabilities of the former and the limited achievability of the latter. The degree of movement between certain boundaries that the adverbial qualifiers imply is not that of what is permissible, i.e., the golden mean, but rather what is achievable in the real world. The desired position is not found halfway between righteousness and wickedness, wisdom and folly, but rather off-centre; in principle one is supposed to be righteous and not to be a fool.

What the reader is left with is a tension between wisdom and ethics. On the one hand Qoheleth is forced to admit that ethics do not make any perceptible difference to how successful one is, and thus have no genuine place in wisdom, while on the other hand he is unwilling to take this to the necessary conclusion and entirely abandon ethical norms as of no value. It might be tempting to try to ascribe this tension to the activity of some pious editor, but the conflict between what Qoheleth thinks should be happening and what he experiences permeates the entire book, making such a solution not particularly convincing. It is much more likely in my view that the tension is one between Qoheleth's experience and his intuition, between his experience and his wisdom heritage.

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[167] It was suggested that v. 19 has been misplaced, e.g. Fox (1989:232) places it after v. 12, but this is done exclusively on the grounds of lack of links with the context. Concerning v. 20, it should be observed that it cannot be understood as an assertion that there are no righteous people at all, for Qoheleth already said that he knows of righteous who suffer a fate they do not deserve.

While Qoheleth offers no further direct instructions as to what ethical grounds to stand on, a glimpse of Qoheleth's own ethics can be caught in what immediately follows the verses quoted above:

> Also, do not pay attention to all the things that are said, so that you may not hear your servant cursing you. For even your heart knows of many times when you also cursed others. [Qoh 7:21-22][168]

Although the primary concern of this instruction is contained in the former verse, v. 22 reveals an important attitude. Qoheleth warns the reader not to treat others any more harshly than one treats oneself. The self serves Qoheleth as a mirror reminding him of the fact that there is no-one who is so righteous as to be without any blemish; self-honesty and humility foster an attitude of tolerance. In fact the attitude of honesty and humility is the principal hallmark of Qoheleth's approach to life and his writing. It shows on the intellectual level when, in spite of his wisdom roots, he finds (and acknowledges) that wisdom lacks true power; it shows in his cosmological perspective when he accepts the apparent realities of life, no matter how unpalatable implications they might have; it shows on the anthropological level, when he is unable to affirm any higher ontological status for a human than for a beast; it shows on the sociological level when he urges one not to be surprised when witnessing the cruelty that one human being causes another; it shows on the theological level, when he assesses the relative positions of God and humanity urging deep respect for God and his power. Thus, while the reader may not agree with Qoheleth, may even dislike him, or consider his views heterodox, it is impossible to label him as an arrogant man who pursues his own ends without being prepared to get involved in a dialogue.

The book is often understood as a critique of traditional wisdom, such as that found in Proverbs. This is true only to a point. Qoheleth indeed struggles with the claims that resemble those found in Proverbs, and repudiates them questioning the optimistic beliefs in the power of wisdom and divine retributive justice. Yet, he does not do this from a stance of someone who despises wisdom, indeed as we have just

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[168] For textual notes see p. 173.

seen, he is reluctant to completely abandon wisdom and its values. Terminology such as *attack on traditional wisdom*, that is sometimes applied to Qoheleth, does injustice to the book, for it gives emotional colouring to Qoheleth's relationship with traditional wisdom, that it does not have; to see in Qoheleth a clash of differing ideologies is to misunderstand the book. Rather, I am inclined to see Qoheleth with Fox (1987:154) as appropriating and extending wisdom; Qoheleth is not about winning an argument, but about the search for truth.

Wisdom and the Epilogue of Qoheleth

The book of Qoheleth is concluded by an epilogue, which, it has long been noted, does not entirely share Qoheleth's views:

> The words of the wise are like spikes and like nails set in place [by] collectors, given by one Shepherd. Above these, my son, be warned: there is no end to producing many books, and much reading tires the body. End of [the] matter, [of] everything heard, fear God and keep his commandments, for this perfects a human being. For every deed God will bring into judgement, concerning everything hidden, whether good, or bad. [Qoh 12:11-14][169]

The voice in the epilogue makes only a brief contribution, yet, from it emerges a very clear picture of what in the epilogist's view constitutes wisdom. Sheppard (1977; 1980:124-25) observed that all the notions forming the epilogist's perspective are derived from the core of the book. While this is true, the selection and emphasis are such that the reader is led in a somewhat different direction than Qoheleth was heading. The epilogist focuses essentially on three of Qoheleth's ideas: limits of wisdom, fearing God and divine judgement.

Qoheleth reiterates again and again that wisdom has serious limits. Yet, the point he is making is not that wisdom and knowledge are entirely useless, but only that they are powerless when it comes to defeating the fundamental flaws of human existence; one should not expect wisdom to deliver the impossible. In contrast, the

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[169] For textual notes see p. 83.

epilogist presents the limits of wisdom in such a way that he undermines the value of intellectual undertaking *per se*; for him the limits of knowing have been reached and anything worthwhile knowing has been recorded. Verses 11-12 suggest that he has a fixed body of material in mind which contains this knowledge; the sages are no more independent thinkers, they have been reduced to collectors. Thus, while Qoheleth urges the reader to acknowledge the limits of knowing, the epilogist effectively prescribes what these limits are.

The second idea that the epilogist takes over from Qoheleth is the notion of fearing God. It was observed above that in contrast to Proverbs, Qoheleth's fearing of God has stronger cultic overtones, with the emphasis being on not abusing the cult and manipulating God, although it encompasses the proverbial core of *fear of Yahweh*, righteousness. The epilogist takes this emphasis further. For him fear of God is expressed in obedience to divine commandments, i.e., direct divine revelation.[170] This concept of fearing God is closely tied to the third of Qoheleth's notions found in the epilogue, that of divine judgement. In Qoheleth proper the divine judgement operates largely on a cosmological level through the bipolarity of life's events preventing genuine gain. At the same time Qoheleth observed that wickedness is not punished and righteousness is not rewarded on an individual basis, and his personal preference for righteousness is not, in spite of his association of righteousness with fearing God, so much grounded in a sense of religious obligation as in his own wisdom roots. In contrast, the epilogist expects a different kind of judgement than the cosmic neutrality. Similarly to the proverbial sages, he believes in judgement that operates on an individual level, and in fact on the plain of individual actions.

As a result of the selective treatment of Qoheleth's ideas the following picture emerges in the epilogue: in the light of human limits, the only thing that really matters in human life is the acceptance of divine authority *and* the divine

[170] The copula in Qoh 12:13 is probably best understood as epexegetical, i.e., fear God *by* obeying his commandments.

command; human beings are held accountable for the response they show to these. In other words, true wisdom, the epilogist argues, is piety and piety alone.[171] At first sight this may seem very much like the proverbial notion of *fear of Yahweh*, but in reality it is not. From the point of view of the epilogue the value of the words of the wise rests solely on the divine origins of the collections that the speaker has in mind. Thus, just as in Proverbs, the sages' wisdom has divine origins. Yet, here the divine inspiration is not applied to the *process* of acquiring wisdom, as it was in Proverbs, but rather to some limited and further unspecified *body of material*. Thus, the separation between experience past and experience present, that started with the proverbial emphasis on cumulative collective experience, has reached a new, and a logically necessary stage; the past wisdom, or more specifically some of it, became sacrosanct and was perceived no more as inspired experience, but simply as revealed command.

Summary

While there are some points of contact between the concepts of wisdom in Proverbs and Qoheleth, in general these are radically different. Proverbial wisdom is essentially a system of ethics, it is largely about handling people. Being wise is the same as being righteous, being wicked amounts to foolishness. The authority of proverbial wisdom stems from inseparable unity between human experience, divine sovereignty and justice. In contrast, Qoheleth's wisdom is void of ethical consideration. While Qoheleth does not advocate life without ethics, his concept of wisdom *per se* is thoroughly pragmatic and his approach to life is probabilistic, looking for ways to handle the unpredictability of the phenomenon of life. The authority of his advice rests squarely on validation by experience. He maintains the notion of divine sovereignty, but in the light of his experience lets go of the

[171] This identification of wisdom with piety in my opinion needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with Qoh 12:11 suggesting that *one shepherd* is indeed a reference to God.

proverbial conviction that God deals justly with individual humans. The brief entry of the epilogist brings in yet another perspective, one in which wisdom amounts to piety, and its authority stems from divine revelation alone, leaving little, if any, space for experience and intellectual endeavour.

The former two concepts of wisdom are not incompatible or even irreconcilable, precisely because Qoheleth's wisdom applies equally to the righteous and to the wicked. Thus one who wishes to follow Qoheleth's advice still has to make the choice whether to accept or reject the proverbial ethics (or any other ethical system). The epilogist's viewpoint is more difficult to merge with the other two. This is not because wisdom of the proverbial sages or Qoheleth would exclude piety, in fact the command to fear and obey God is inherent to both. The problem is that piety in these two cases exists in the context of independent intellectual inquiry, which the epilogist more or less rejects. His piety is entirely cult driven and the revelatory process is all encompassing — in the 20th century, we would label this a fundamentalist viewpoint.

Excursus

PROVERBS AND QOHELETH IN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The worldviews represented by the two books and pieced together in the preceding chapters raise certain questions of an historical nature which have not been addressed in this study so far, mainly because they do not lie at the heart of the present work. Yet, since the study has a direct bearing on these questions, at least a few brief comments are appropriate.

First of all, it was noted in chapter 3 that the theological perspective expressed in the Wisdom speeches of Prov 1-9 serves as a backbone to the proverbial paradigm, on the one hand fitting exactly the needs of this paradigm, on the other hand failing to provide theologically satisfactory answers to the problem of the origins of Folly and its power over humanity. This led us to the conclusion that this theological perspective was derived from the wisdom paradigm itself, or in other words, that the theological perspective is subservient to it. The significance of this emerges when it is considered that the proverbial concept of wisdom is mostly formulated in the sayings of Prov 10-31, for it implies that the theo-cosmological framework we find in Prov 1-9 is derived from the worldview of the sayings in Prov 10-31; it is not an external framework imposed on it. This calls into serious question the argument commonly used for a very late date of Prov 1-9, namely that it contains a developed and, more importantly, distinct theological perspective; the theological

perspective of Prov 1-9 is not different from that of Prov 10-31, only formulated in a more eloquent manner.[1]

Further, I have pointed out that the principal function of Prov 1-9 is to motivate the reader to take the sayings that follow seriously, but contains very limited practical advice. In my view this imbalance is such that the opening section of the book is not capable of independent existence, for it speaks of the significance of acquiring wisdom without largely defining what constitutes wise living. These two observations strongly suggest that Prov 1-9 was composed[2] specifically as a foreword to the sayings that follow it. While it is possible that this took place chronologically some time after the composition of the saying-collections, this does not necessarily have to be so, and the theology-based relative dating of these two sections of the book is not satisfactory. In the past, questions about the late date of this section of Proverbs have been raised by some, pointing out certain features of these texts that betray greater antiquity of the material than is commonly granted to it; these gain a renewed force in the light of the present analysis.[3]

We further observed in chapter 3 that the use of the personal name יהוה appears to be mainly apologetic trying to identify the sages' God with Yahweh. This, it was argued, would seem to suggest that the origins of the proverbial wisdom come from the time when the mainstream religious perception of Yahweh was as a tribal God. Thus, it is likely that the perspective that Proverbs represents originates before the exile, and it is most likely that the book attests to early stages of conscious interaction of wisdom with the cult. In contrast, Qoheleth's systematic reference to God as אֱלֹהִים, yet, accompanied by a strictly monotheistic perspective, suggests that Qoheleth is writing at a time when Yahweh is no more seen as a tribal deity, but as the only God, i.e., in a time when what initially appeared to be the perspective

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[1] Compare the conclusion reached by Kassis (1999:275) that distinct stages of religious development cannot be discerned in the present shape of the book.

[2] By *composed* I do not mean here necessarily the production of an entirely original composition, for the inner makeup of this material is rather complex (see for instance Whybray 1994a), but rather the editorial activity that formed it into its present shape.

[3] See Kayatz's (1966) work on the affinity of Prov 1-9 with ancient Egyptian wisdom, Lang's (1986) observations about possible rooting of the Dame Wisdom figure in an ancient Hebrew goddess, and Kitchen's (1977) comparative work on the development of wisdom forms in the ANE.

reserved to the wisdom sages became widespread; this corresponds well with the almost certain linguistically-based date of the book in the Hellenistic period. Considering the point made above concerning the relationship between Prov 1-9 and the rest of Proverbs, this in my view decreases the probability that Prov 1-9 was written in an historical proximity to Qoheleth. Further, these observations imply that in fact the shift from tribal to global theological perspective was influenced by the wisdom enterprise, giving some credence to Sheppard's (1980:13) claim that rather than speaking of theologisation of wisdom, we should speak of 'wisdomisation' of theology, at least concerning one stage in the development of the relationship between the two.

While dealing with the epistemology of the two books in chapter 2 we noted a critical epistemological shift between the outlook of Qoheleth proper and Proverbs on the one hand, and the epilogue to Qoheleth on the other hand. The difference in these perspectives led us to the conclusion that the perspective of the epilogist is not a wisdom perspective but a cultic one; the epilogist is not a sage, but a theologian. Thus, the epilogue attests to a stage in the development of the relationship between wisdom and the cult, where the theologian regains the control. In the emerging worldview that the epilogist represents the human quest for understanding, so central to wisdom, loses its autonomy, and ultimately significance. While it might be an exaggeration to say that this is due to Qoheleth alone, there is little doubt that it is the result of the state of affairs that Qoheleth witnesses to, namely, wisdom failing to provide the absolute, black and white, answers that human beings always desired and probably always will. The epilogist's answer to this is to theologise wisdom in a manner it had not been before, and it is this form in which it is found in the later wisdom writings such as Ben Sira.[4]

[4] Cf. Dell (1994b:313). It is worth noting that this oscillating relationship between wisdom and theology is not peculiar to ancient Israel, for precisely the same phenomenon can be observed in more modern theological development, such as the shift from the medieval scholasticism to the liberal theology springing from the enlightenment, and again the renewed 'cultic' emphasis of neo-orthodoxy after the disillusionment of the First World War. It is this type of phenomenological pattern that hides behind Qoheleth's claim that there is nothing new under the sun.

In chapter 4 we observed a major difference between the socio-economic structures that are reflected in Proverbs and Qoheleth. I have argued that the world of Proverbs is one of a decentralised economy revolving around a small local community, where each individual has its place and the success of the community depends on its members working and living together in harmony. The family is the most significant and in principle the highest formal hierarchical structure of the proverbial society. We have observed that while kingship appears in Proverbs on numerous occasions, the king is not a truly meaningful part of the book's world. In contrast Qoheleth's world is one of large empires, where the proverbial equality has been replaced by a hierarchy in which only those at the very top benefit from the produce of the land. Thus, the world that Qoheleth portrays fits the Hellenistic period extremely well. The question of matching Proverbs to a historical period is more difficult. First of all, I am inclined to reject the possibility that the proverbial world is a fictional one, i.e., that it was created without the conviction that it depicts the real world out there. For this the concerns of the book are too down-to-earth, and the aims it strives to achieve too practical; there is a clear conviction in the book that this is not just the world as it should be, but as it really is. Thus, I think we need to look for an historical setting that would reasonably match the world that the book outlines.[5] It is my view, that the proverbial perspective is unlikely to have originated in the Hellenistic, or more generally post-exilic period, for the forces that would have been a part of a large emporium (be it Persia or Greece), caused by centralised rule and taxation accompanied by extensive international trade (that we have seen at work in Qoheleth), do not fit the proverbial state of affairs. Further, the period of the Babylonian exile is also an improbable setting. While one may want to argue that the closed-off community pictured here is that of the exiles, trying to preserve their own identity, it is unlikely that an effort to instruct the young generation in such a manner as to differentiate themselves from the society of the captors would have

[5] At this stage a distinction has to be made between the proverbial outlook on the one hand, and the tangible expression of it that we find in the present shape of the book, for the date assigned to the two can be significantly different if, for instance, the book was composed as a retrospective return to a distant past in an attempt to restore some of its values. It is the outlook that I wish to concentrate on at the present.

systematically avoided any reference to the entity of Israel, the preservation of which would have been the primary concern of the authors of the material, if such an identification was to be correct. It is much more likely, that this feature of the material stems from a time when the national identity was not the real issue.

Placing the origins of the proverbial perspective as a whole into the pre-exilic monarchy is in my view not fully satisfactory either. While the degree of centralisation would have been lesser than during the imperial period after the exile, the socio-economic structures would have been of a larger scale than the proverbial material depicts. In particular, taxation was already very severe under Solomon,[6] and it is precisely the unbearable level of taxation that is reported in 1 Kgs 12 as the reason for the break-up of the monarchy. Further, the system where land was considered strictly tribal/family property was breaking down during the monarchy.[7] Therefore, there would have been the possibility to purchase land allowing for some degree of movement from one small community to other. In addition, the Solomonic building projects must have had a far reaching impact on the social arrangements of the time, for they required a huge number of labourers and thus on the one hand would have hindered the family-based farming and agriculture, and on the other hand meant large scale movement of population. Yet, there is no hint in Proverbs of such an upheaval taking place and the rather superficial integration of the royal references into the socio-economic structures of the proverbial world makes origins in a well established pre-exilic monarchy unlikely.

I am, therefore, inclined to think that we have to look for the origins of the proverbial outlook in the pre-monarchic and the early monarchic periods. Family-based, rather than nation-based identity and socio-economic independence of small family units, such as seen in the patriarchal narratives or depicted in the book of Ruth, combined with the closed nature of these family-based communities, fits the

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[6] While the historical value of the account of Solomon's rule can be questioned, I am prepared to give at least some credence to the assertions of 1 Kgs 4-5, concerning the erection of the Jerusalem temple in the early monarchy, which project would have required major resources.

[7] Consider for instance the purchase of land by David from Araunah [2 Sam 24:18ff.] or the story of Naboth's vineyard [1 Kgs 21].

proverbial profile best and it is my view that the book needs to be interpreted against that background.[8] Once this perspective is accepted, some of the persistently criticised naiveté of the book disappears, for in such a setting the wicked would indeed more often than not suffer and the righteous prosper, simply due to the economic forces at work in such a small and interdependent community.

At the same time, it has to be appreciated that the text as we find it in the book today is a literary product rather than a mere recording of an earlier oral tradition, one unlikely to have originated in what is basically a rural setting. I wish to suggest that the wisdom tradition and ideals originating in the pre-monarchic era continued to be cultivated and adhered to even when the monarchy came into place. For while a monarch can be put on the throne overnight, a change in the society's daily practices and structures develops only gradually.[9] The early royal advisors would have been grounded in the pre-monarchic wisdom and would have adjusted their understanding only gradually, as the monarchy was taking root. Initially, there would have been very little that needed to be adapted to the new conditions, for the king could easily be fitted into the proverbial paradigm as a representative and defender of the rule of the divine order over chaos. Such a development would be logical and matches the proverbial picture very well. I am, therefore, inclined to think that we should look for the literary beginnings of the book during the early monarchy.[10] As the monarchy settled in and developed, the increasing socio-economic changes would have meant that the harmonious life pictured by the ancient sages would have been more and more remote from daily reality, and so would have become an ideal from a distant past, yet, a heritage passionately held onto by successive generations of wise men, for I have explained that the nature of the role of

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[8] The suggestion that wisdom roots are in such a setting is not entirely new. However, in the past this has been generally argued on the basis of comparing Proverbs to contemporary proverbial material from certain tribal cultures, namely in Africa (e.g. Golka 1993; Westermann 1995). Such an approach is connected with certain methodological problems, namely the possibility of direct influence of the biblical tradition on the material to which it is being compared. In contrast, I have attempted to show that Proverbs itself provides ample clues to such a primary setting of the material.

[9] Jamieson-Drake (1991) has argued that on basis of archaeological evidence the term *state* can only be applied to Israel from about 8th century BC onwards, which would seem to lend some support to the present assertion.

[10] If my analysis is correct, it might also be necessary to review the evaluation of the traditional association of Proverbs with Solomon, for this could be closer to reality than is normally allowed.

God in the proverbial epistemology is such that it makes it difficult, if not entirely impossible, to adapt the paradigm to any significant degree of change.

However, eventually the picture of the world that it portrayed would have become untenable even to those who stood firmly within the wisdom tradition, as Qoheleth's evaluation of the traditional wisdom understanding of the world shows. We have, therefore, to ask what it was that caused the book to survive and eventually be included in the Hebrew bible. In this respect the later trend toward the theologisation of wisdom, pointed out above, would have helped, providing a new point of reference for reading the book, affirming the validity of its perspective not on the grounds of experience, but the affinity of its ethical stance with the ethos of the prophetic and legal traditions. However, it is possible that there is yet another, and more practical, factor at play here. In my view it is quite possible that the proverbial world and values have been intentionally resurrected during a much later time than the one from which they stem, a time when the nation lost the ultimate control over the higher socio-economic superstructures and when the importance of the family for preservation of the nation and its heritage became increasingly clear.[11] The book then would not have been seen as depicting the world that was, but the world that could have and ultimately should have been, a world worth striving for, offering hope by pointing back to a time when the righteous prospered and the joy of the wicked was quickly snuffed out.

Finally, a few comments regarding the *Sitz im Leben* of Proverbs and Qoheleth are appropriate. As for the latter book, the information on which the judgment can be formed is scanty. The comments of the epilogist suggest a didactic setting. At the same time, it was observed in chapter 3 that although Qoheleth's perspective is strictly monotheistic, he does not engage in apologetic with polytheistic views. Considering the Hellenistic environment in which he found himself, this silence makes it quite likely that the book was not intended for wide use but rather was addressing a smaller group for which this was not an issue that needed

[11] A similar concept of the world, with emphasis on the family, can be found in the Mishna, see for instance Neusner (1998).

to be discussed. It is possible to speculate from this that in fact the book is a kind of an 'academic paper', however, the data is too limited to allow a convincing case to be built.

The *Sitz im Leben* of Proverbs has been widely debated. Usually the setting suggested for the material is a formal school (Kovacs 1974, Shupak 1984), the royal court (Fox 1996b), or a juridical system of a small village or town based community (Westermann 1995). If the understanding of the origins of the book proposed above is adopted, then each of these settings is applicable to the book at a particular stage in its transmission. The book is clearly meant as didactic material, and the perspective it expresses shows that the education it was intended to aid initially revolved around the family. At the same time, it was observed in chapter 1, that formal education on a commercial basis was not only known, but also seen as an element, if not a particular stage, in the educational process. Later, as the court became the centre of wisdom, the book came to be used in this new setting, and probably for purposes that were not entirely identical with the initial intention, such as education of the courtiers. Finally, if my suggestion about later re-appropriation of the book under the threat of loss of national identity is correct, the book would have changed its *Sitz im Leben* yet again, for since it would have been seen as a tool in restoring the world from a distant past, a world no more in existence, it would have needed to be used in a much wider context than merely education of youngsters. Consequently, the book *per se* cannot be assigned exclusively to any particular setting.[12] The brief proverbial forms elude the form-critical category of *Sitz im Leben*, which has proved so useful in analysing other genres of the OT. This, I wish to suggest, is due to their flexibility, which allows them to be adapted to new conditions without losing their cutting edge. Thus Van Leeuwen's (1988) thesis that the *Sitz im Leben* is replaced in Proverbs by *Sitz im Buch* may need to be revised, for it appears that proverbial forms have no inherent *Sitz im Leben* in the first place.

[12] A similar conclusion was reached by Fontaine (1993) and Kassis (1999).

CONCLUSIONS

The Two Worlds

Having examined the 'dissected' pieces of the two books it is time to take a step back and look again at the whole. What have we learned about the sages who produced these books, about the world they lived in, about the issues they struggled with? First of all, it was observed that the enterprise which these books witness to is concerned with understanding the place of humanity in the world, understanding what shapes human experience and what can be done to influence it. This entire enterprise has one specific end in view, to make the most of being, or as we may put it nowadays, to improve one's quality of life.

We have observed that the sages' search for understanding is paradigmatic, in the sense that it does not operate with absolute and precise truths, but only reasonable approximations of the reality that are sufficient for its purposes. The fundamental reason for this approach lies in the conviction, traceable in both texts, that there are limits to human knowledge, albeit these limits differ between the two books. For the proverbial sages that which one can know greatly outweighs that which is inaccessible; Qoheleth, in contrast, perceives the impact of that which is beyond the reach of the human intellect as far more important than what a human being can comprehend.

This issue is closely related to the process of acquiring knowledge. In the case of both books the primary source of knowledge is observation. Both texts share the view that human experience is essentially uniform across the ages, but they draw radically different conclusions from this initial premise. The proverbial sages give priority to a collective experience, to observations that have been confirmed again

and again by successive generations, assuming that the present and future can be understood from knowing the past; the proverbial epistemology is inductive. Qoheleth, on the other hand, relies largely on first-hand data. For him the uniformity of human experience means that the key to understanding the future lies not in the past, but in the verifiable present; Qoheleth's epistemology is deductive.

We saw that God is an important part of the epistemological process in both books, yet, his role is radically different in each case. The God of the proverbial sages walks along with them in their quest to understand the world and their place in it, encourages their enquiry, and ultimately speaks to them through their experience. Qoheleth's God, in stark contrast, is largely silent, if not actively obstructive. He does not have any genuine interest in humanity gaining deeper insights into the nature of the world and his plans and intentions within it; human ignorance guards his position and human respect for him.

It was further noted that the epistemological perspective of the epilogue is different from either that of Proverbs or Qoheleth, for in the epilogue information about the world that matters comes from direct revelation. The epilogist's epistemology is centred around the cult, the value of the human search for understanding of the world is depreciated by him, and the emphasis is put on the limits of the wisdom search. The seeming resemblance of this emphasis to that of Qoheleth himself is only superficial, for while Qoheleth principally believed that the world is ultimately unknowable in the sense that there is more to be known than humans can possibly comprehend, the epilogist was convinced that everything worth knowing is already known, thus emptying the search for more knowledge of meaning.

The one thing that the worlds of Qoheleth and of the proverbial sages have in common is that they do not expect any meaningful afterlife; their interest is in the here and now, their paradigms are built around, and meant to be applied to, this world alone. The dead reside in Sheol, an undesirable place of oblivion, a place from

which there is no return and which offers no opportunities to exercise wisdom. Beyond these commonalities the two cosmologies differ. The proverbial world is highly regular and predictable. This is because God has a tight grip on it and makes sure that human actions are accompanied by appropriate, i.e., just, consequences.

Yet, we have detected in the book that it is not an ideal world, that in fact, the sages were aware that sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous do not. While this is always implied to be only a minor and temporary setback, it does raise the question of who is responsible. The sages are reluctant to put the blame on God, for the proverbial God is never on the side of the fools, never condoning their ploys. At the same time, the sages are unwilling to even contemplate the possibility that the divine grip on the world might not be as firm as they assume.

As a result, forces of chaos are always tacitly present in the proverbial cosmos and their battle with forces of order is vividly portrayed in the imagery of the two women, Wisdom and Folly. The origin and place of these forces in the proverbial cosmos are never really spelled out. We have concluded from this that the theo-cosmological framework is derived from, and subservient to, the larger picture of the world arrived at through observation. The proverbial Yahwism is quite different from the Yahwism of the cult, and in the light of that it is unlikely that the religious layer of the proverbial worldview has been imported from the cult. Rather, an attempt is made to present the proverbial theological perspective so as not to look too divergent from it. The central instrument in this is the concept of *fear of Yahweh* which is sufficiently specific from the wisdom perspective to describe how humans should live in God's world, and at the same time, it is also sufficiently vague from the cultic perspective so that it does not clash with the theology of the cult.

Qoheleth's world is also predictable, but in an entirely different sense than applied to Proverbs. The predictability lies in the fact that the world never produces any long-term benefit for human beings, the positive is always in the end paired up with the negative cancelling it out; death reverses everything, whether good or bad.

This feature of the world is an intentional divine design; it is to inspire fear of God. Qoheleth wishes that his God would be more like the one of the proverbial sages, blessing the righteous and punishing the wicked, but he finds no tangible evidence of that; the divine judgement does not appear to entail anything more than the reality of death.

There is no hint of the tacit dualism we detected in Proverbs, no struggle between Wisdom and Folly, order and chaos; Qoheleth's God is entirely in control, an absolute ruler, accountable to no-one. He is neither positively inclined to humans, nor is he perceived as a tyrant; he stands at a distance. Yet, Qoheleth advises to respect him fully, not by foolish and shallow rituals, but by accepting and revering his qualitative superiority. The epilogist shares Qoheleth's view about the absolute sovereignty of God, yet, in contrast to Qoheleth, he believes that God is involved in human existence more directly, and presumably, in a more positive manner, via the cult.

This brings us to the view of human beings and human society that the two books have. In both cases humanity is understood as divine creation. However, proverbial anthropology is quite high, humans were created in the image of God and were endowed with a number of skills, and in particular with a powerful reasoning capacity. In contrast, a human being is very much an animal for Qoheleth; he is unable to affirm any significant difference between the two. Further, any capabilities that God gave to humans are severely crippled. This perspective would appear to be shared by the epilogist, who, as we have already noted, takes the implications of the inability to understand further than Qoheleth himself does.

It was also noted that both Proverbs and Qoheleth agree that the natural human inclination is toward folly and evil, but again behind the agreement lies a rather different understanding. The proverbial sages are optimistic about the power of wisdom and discipline to overcome this natural tendency. In contrast, Qoheleth

expresses explicitly the view that righteousness is merely an ideal which is unachievable.

The social perspectives, and the social structures that we have detected in the two books are strikingly different. The proverbial world is one of a small community of neighbours and relatives who are mutually dependent on each other for their survival and prosperity. The basic structure in this world is the family with age-based hierarchy, but in essence the individual members of the community are perceived as equals, irrespective of their economic condition. Thus even the poor are perceived as having a place in the community and are to be treated with compassion and respect. The principal concern of the proverbial sages is to preserve the community's coherence; it lurks in the background of most of what the book has to say. This should not be obscured from us by the fact that the form of address and the motivation centres around an individual; the proverbial worldview is at its very heart communal.

Qoheleth's world could not be more different. It is a world where power is centralised, a world of large empires, military campaigns, fast changing administrations. The mutual interdependence of near neighbours is nowhere to be seen, the sense that the poor still has a valid place in the society is gone. It is a world with no hint of equality, a world where hierarchy is everything and the structures of which are geared to serve those at its very top. It is a world of no privacy where the ears of the powerful stretch as far as people's bedrooms.

In the light of these differences, it should not be at all surprising that the two concepts of wise behaviour are diametrically different. We have seen that in Proverbs being wise and being righteous are two sides of the same coin, for in the divinely upheld order of the world righteousness is the prerequisite of success. In contrast, Qoheleth's wisdom is void of ethical considerations, for whether one is righteous or wicked makes little impact on one's prospects of success. True, Qoheleth shows preference for righteousness, but from the point of view of the wisdom quest he is

unable to affirm it as an integral part of being wise. In Qoheleth's world success is always only temporary and wisdom is about ways that might prolong its life-span or avoid total disasters, yet, only in terms of probabilities rather than certainties. Thus wisdom, a priceless commodity in Proverbs, has only limited value for Qoheleth. It is better than folly but in the end it cannot deliver what Qoheleth would like it to, and what the Proverbial sages believed it did. The epilogist is prepared to take Qoheleth's analysis even further, essentially rejecting the wisdom enterprise as a continuous and meaningful process; the sages already know all they possibly can and need to. For the epilogist the way to success is not via human understanding, but lies in obedience to the divine command.

The principal difference between the perspectives of Proverbs, Qoheleth and that of the epilogue can be formulated differently again, in the terms of the Joban problem, i.e., the tension at the heart of the Joban dialogues, between human experience, the sovereignty of God and divine justice. In Proverbs, this problem does not exist; experience, God's sovereignty and divine justice are in mutual harmony. However, the problem emerges as soon as the type of paradigm that is found in Proverbs, and adhered to by Job's friends, has to deal with experience that does not fit into it; the proverbial paradigm is not capable of coping with situations such as that found in Job. This is due to the vicious epistemological circle pointed out earlier in this study, which means that the sages cannot give up either of these three notions and still hold onto their paradigm; a brand new paradigm is needed. Thus, Qoheleth insists on the validity of experience and the sovereignty of God, but abandons the notion that God deals justly with humanity. In contrast, the epilogist holds onto the sovereignty of God and the notion of divine justice, but devalues experience. The former solution is that of a reverent sage, the latter is that of a theologian.[1]

[1] In contrast, Job challenges both divine justice and sovereignty, while the narrative frame of Job offers a solution in the divine, rather than earthly domain.

What overall conclusions then should be drawn from our observations? The first implication, and probably one of the most important, concerns the fact that the nature of the relationship between the two books is much more complex than is sometimes acknowledged. Putting aside for the moment the complications introduced by the epilogue to Qoheleth, Proverbs and Qoheleth proper cannot be perceived as voices singing slightly different variations of the same basic tune in harmony with each other, yet, at the same time, painting them as two voices in a head-on conflict with each other is equally unsatisfactory.

We have seen that there are major differences between the two perspectives concerning the nature of the cosmos and God and the relationship between the two. This prevents the conclusion that the two voices are at least in principle variations on an identical theme. On the other hand, it was argued that there are significant similarities between the two books in the object of their quest and methods they employ in their search for answers; both books are an expression of a quest for understanding of the place of humanity in the world with the view to facilitating success, and both of them use observation as the starting point of their quest. Further, both Qoheleth and the proverbial sages perceive knowledge and understanding as the keys to achieving the goal. Thus, these two books clearly stem from the same tradition of thought, one which I have argued can be characterised as *a quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator, and self-realisation in the context of these relationships, based on a primarily empirical epistemology and a paradigmatic approach to understanding*. While in many important respects Qoheleth disagrees with the perspective of the proverbial sages, it is quite clear that he wishes to hold onto certain ideals firmly rooted in the proverbial world, even though he is not able to justify them in a manner that he would find satisfactory.

This already complex picture is further complicated by the third voice, that of the epilogue. While the perspectives of Proverbs and Qoheleth proper originate in the same tradition, we are forced to conclude that the views of the epilogist do not stem

from the same background and presuppositions. The epilogist is not a sage, he is a theologian whose primary concern is with the cult and the revelation that it provides. His concern is that the human quest for understanding is acknowledged to be truly limited in what it can achieve, and this fact is pressed to its full implications, i.e., that the wisdom quest needs to be subjected to the understanding that comes from the cult. In this respect the epilogist is not unlike the modern-day theologian with his or her preference for the cultic and prophetic material, and what we are witnessing here is probably one of the earliest attested attempts to bring together the two different traditions; to the credit of the epilogist, his approach would seem to have become the later norm.

When the methodological similarities observed earlier and the diverging perceptions of God and the world, with the practical strategy for living derived from them, are brought together, another critical conclusion emerges, namely, that the differences between Proverbs and Qoheleth have to be sought not in different initial premises, for all their initial premises are identical, but in different experience. This is confirmed by the observations about the social structures reflected in the books. The proverbial sages find themselves in a world that operates on different economic principles and is governed by different social arrangements than the society in which Qoheleth is located. While the different perspectives are influenced by other issues, such as a different audience, it is my view that the different socio-economic structures detected were the principal formative factors in the process through which the two different worldviews were arrived at.

The fundamental problem with these books lies not in the fact that the worlds of the sages differed, but in their inability to shake off the premise of uniformity of human experience through time, on which both epistemologies rest. It is this premise that is largely responsible for the impossibility of these books to be reconciled with each other, for they continue to speak of *the World*, without ever considering that they may know merely *a world*, the one of their own. If the present conclusion about the principal socio-economic roots of the differences is correct, it is pointless to

compare the two perspectives asking which one is better, more realistic and accurate. They both speak of what they know and experience, trying to come to grips with their individual worlds; trying to make the two to conform to one another is merely an extension of the same fallacy the sages fell for, the belief that the human world does not change.

I pointed out at the start of the present inquiry, that the query about the nature of the world that hides behind Proverbs and Qoheleth is closely related to the widely debated question of what constitutes wisdom. I believe that the results of the present examination of Proverbs and Qoheleth lend some support to the suggestion I made at the outset, namely, that the key question in attempting to come to grips with wisdom is not that of forms, vocabulary or elementary subjects, but rather one of overall aims and methodology. Applying this approach to Proverbs and Qoheleth allowed us to see a very tangible and profound link between Proverbs and Qoheleth proper, and yet, we were able to do so without ignoring the significant differences between these two books. At the same time, this method enabled us to spot a principal difference between Proverbs and Qoheleth proper on the on hand, and the epilogue of Qoheleth on the other, in spite of the superficial similarities that the epilogue might have with either book.

The principal divergence of the epilogue from the other two bodies of text is symptomatic of the wider gap between these texts and much of the OT material, suggesting that the present approach has the potential to cast further light on our understanding of the wisdom phenomenon in the wider OT context. For instance, it might be fruitful in coming to grips with material such as Job, which, although traditionally perceived as a wisdom text, fails to fit into a narrow definition of wisdom based on forms, content and *Sitz im Leben*.[2]

Further, the significance of the tension created by the epilogue for our understanding of the biblical wisdom tradition has not yet been, in my view, fully

[2] See Dell (1991).

appreciated. The noticeable shift of perspective between Proverbs and Qoheleth arises, I argued, as a result of a socio-economic change, i.e., it is a response of the empirical methodology to new conditions, and can, therefore, be seen as an internal development of the tradition. However, what the epilogue represents is rather different, for it amounts to putting another tradition and its methodology in control of the original quest, so that for all practical purposes the epistemology ceases to be empirical; in other words, this is not merely an internal development of the tradition. I suspect that in fact this is what is happening in the later wisdom texts,[3] such as Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon, and that an examination of these works with focus on their aims and methods might reveal that the affinity of these texts with books like Proverbs and Qoheleth is in fact much weaker that a form-critical analysis might suggest.

Wisdom Theology Revisited

It was acknowledged in the Introduction that the present enquiry had been motivated largely by theological concerns about the place of the two books, and wisdom material in general, in the OT canon; questions that have to do with a community of faith and the use it makes, can make, and perhaps should make, of these texts. Yet, these questions have not so far been touched upon at all. This, as explained at the beginning, has been a deliberate decision stemming from the conviction that before these texts are responsibly placed into a larger theological framework of a canon/community of faith, their individual voices have to be heard and their individual points of view considered carefully. It is only when the theologian allows the autonomous voices to be heard that he or she can step into the dialogue in which these voices are engaged (and have been long before he or she entered the scene); only then can the theologian perhaps seek more systematic answers to the questions they raise and struggle with. While it has been obvious from

[3] See Hayman (1991a).

the very beginning that the scope and physical limits of this work would not allow engagement in this type of dialogue with the two books, it is only appropriate to make a few limited comments along these lines in the final paragraphs of this thesis; these should be perceived more as suggestions for further work than an attempt to resolve the issues.

It was the author's sincere, and with hindsight naïve, hope that a detailed examination of the perspectives of the two books might offer some simple solution to the tension between them that the successive generations of their readers perceive in them, or at least instinctively sense. While I believe that the outcome of the examination offers a solid starting point for further considerations of the place and significance of the voices of the sages in the OT, and in this sense represents a step forward in dealing with the broader theological implications of wisdom literature for OT theology, it does not offer an easy way out of the difficulties that the OT theologian faces with respect to wisdom material, as was outlined in the Introduction.

The observations made in the present work, and summarised in the previous section, confirm what has now been acknowledged for some time, that wisdom is not about timeless truths, but it is the product of its own time and circumstances. Thus, simply understanding Proverbs and Qoheleth as two different analyses of the same reality is not possible, and any attempt to compare them and assign value to them along these lines has to be rejected. On the level of the worldviews these books represent, and it is the worldviews that are the theologian's principal raw material, there are differences between them that cannot be easily disregarded, indeed, differences that in my view cannot be reconciled. The world of Proverbs is one in which justice operates with a high degree of reliability, a world in which integrity, diligence and wisdom lead to success. In contrast, in Qoheleth's world none of these virtues guarantees anything, justice is at best as often done as it is not, and the only thing that can be taken for granted is the reality of death with all its implications.

When I said that the two worldviews cannot be reconciled, I meant more precisely that they cannot be reconciled on their own terms. In reality, the theologian will always find ways to reconcile perspectives he or she considers as needing to be upheld; the whole notion of a canon dictates so much. A number of options are open to such a theologian. For one, he or she can conclude that while Qoheleth makes a valid point, the validity of the proverbial perspective, and in particular of the proverbial ethics, does not stem from the assertion that it leads to success and prosperity, but from the fact that it is divinely revealed truth. Such an approach is, I think, in the spirit of Proverbs, for success is used in Proverbs as a motivation rather than justification; when the choice between wisdom and material prosperity is to be made, wisdom wins. What, however, such a theologian has to ask him- or her-self, is whether relegating Qoheleth merely to the position of a warning against excessive optimism concerning wisdom's potential does justice to the latter book; I think not.

Another obvious option is open to the theologian: to declare the epilogue of Qoheleth to be the normative voice prescribing how the book should be understood and effectively emptying the material of any serious force. At least two points have to be raised here in response to such an approach. First, it is unlikely that the epilogue was ever intended to be an outright nullification of Qoheleth proper. It does soften the edges of the book, but it shows too much respect for the person of Qoheleth and is too brief to be seen as a complete rebuttal; its primary purpose is to draw conclusions of its own from the results of Qoheleth's enquiry. Further, such an understanding of the relationship between Qoheleth proper and the epilogue fails to fully appreciate the perspective the epilogue itself represents, for as I have argued the epilogist's world revolves around a cult-centred view of God and as such his perspective is not at all a wisdom perspective in terms of the definition laid down earlier. Re-reading Qoheleth purely in the terms of the epilogue may seem to eliminate the tension between Proverbs and Qoheleth, but this is not the result of making Qoheleth more like Proverbs, but rather transforming Qoheleth into a non-wisdom text. Further, if the point of the epilogue is pressed, the theological value of

wisdom texts in general, not just Qoheleth, is undermined because the epilogist's solution takes away from them the axis around which they revolve, the quest for understanding itself. The wisdom tradition becomes merely wisdom texts, and I have argued that this is an inadequate way of perceiving wisdom, for wisdom is about a quest of the human intellect, not about mere possession of information.

The canonical theologian can adopt yet a different approach, by integrating the two books into a broader theological framework that circumvents their differences. The typical example of such a solution is the introduction of the concept of life after death as a mediator between the two. While this concept is external to both, it can be done without much violence to the two books; Qoheleth never resolutely denied such a possibility, limiting his claims strictly to the here and now, and Proverbs does not contemplate the option at all. By extending the proverbial retribution beyond the grave the most obvious tension between the two books is at least muted if not removed. Is such a solution adequate? Not really, because it, just as all the solutions outlined above, deals with the symptoms, not the cause. The tension within the wisdom tradition is usually analysed in terms of the question of retribution, i.e., whether the world is or is not just. While this is the most obvious clash point in the dialogue of the OT wisdom texts, it is not really at the heart of the problem. The real problem that the theologian has to address is not what the books have to say about the world, but what they have to say about God himself, because, as I have argued, in both books the perceptions of the world are inseparable from the perceptions about God. It is precisely for this reason the epilogist, who is a theologian at heart, felt it necessary to make himself heard. His worries are not about what Qoheleth has to say about life, but what he implies about God; his concern is not to stop one identifying with the reality that Qoheleth describes, but to stop one losing faith in God on account of this reality.

In my view, a completely new approach is required from the biblical theologian, simple synchronic treatment of these texts is unsatisfactory. A possible answer may lie in a dialectical approach, considering not only the differences and

similarities between the two books, but the changes that lie at the heart of them; I personally am inclined to think that the formative influence of external environment on the wisdom perspective is possibly of a greater theological significance than the particular perspectives of Proverbs and Qoheleth *per se*.

Quite clearly, further work is needed by those interested in biblical wisdom. In spite of the significant advances that have been made in this relatively young field of biblical studies, our overall understanding of the background of the wisdom material in the OT, its true extent, and its impact on the intellectual and theological formation of ancient Israel, is still rather limited. Should one feel daunted by the enormity of the task ahead, a consolation can be found in the fact that such a quest continues a fine tradition, for there is no end to making many books about wisdom.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

THE CHIASTIC PATTERNS WITHIN THE TIME POEM

[1] לַכֹּל זְמָן וְעֵת לְכָל־חֵפֶץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ ס	
[2] עֵת לָלֶדֶת וְעֵת לָמוּת עֵת לָטַעַת וְעֵת לַעֲקוֹר נָטוּעַ׃	[3] עֵת לַהֲרוֹג וְעֵת לִרְפּוֹא עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת׃
[4] עֵת לִבְכּוֹת וְעֵת לִשְׂחוֹק עֵת סְפוֹד וְעֵת רְקוֹד׃	[5] עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עֵת לַחֲבוֹק וְעֵת לִרְחֹק מֵחַבֵּק׃
[6] עֵת לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד עֵת לִשְׁמוֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ׃	[7] עֵת לִקְרוֹעַ וְעֵת לִתְפּוֹר עֵת לַחֲשׂוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר׃
[8] עֵת לֶאֱהֹב וְעֵת לִשְׂנֹא עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת שָׁלוֹם׃ ס [9] מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עָמֵל׃	

In the preceding diagram the positive statements are marked by red, the negative statements by blue, each stanza on a single line. Note the chiasm within each stanza as well as between the stanzas. Verse 5 should almost certainly be interpreted

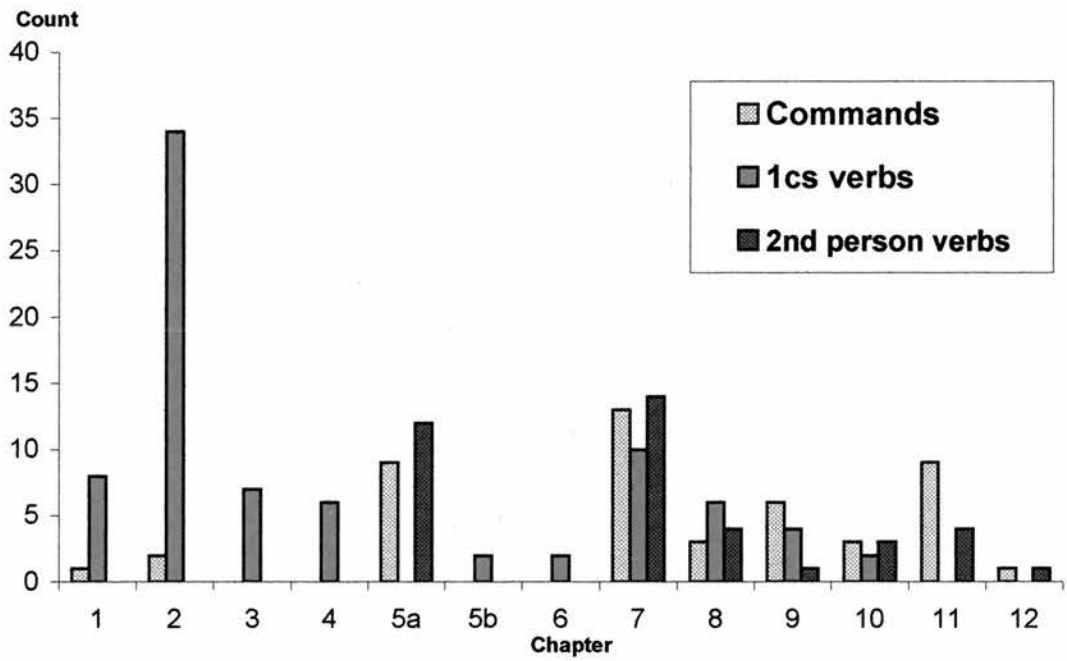
according to this chiastic pattern, but due to the obscurity of its meaning the negative/positive contrast is not immediately obvious. Verse 9 should, contrary to 𝔐 paragraph division, be included with the poem, for it forms a frame with v. 1. The poem captures the very essence of Qoheleth's view of the world; there is no gain for human beings, because anything that happens has its counterpart.

THE STRUCTURE OF QOH 1:4-11

4 דּוֹר הֹלֵךְ֙ וְדוֹר בָּ֣א וְהָאָ֔רֶץ לְעוֹלָ֖ם עֹמָֽדֶת׃	
5 וְזָרַ֣ח הַשֶּׁ֔מֶשׁ וּבָ֖א הַשָּׁ֑מֶשׁ וְאֶל־מְקוֹמ֥וֹ שׁוֹאֵ֛ף זוֹרֵ֥חַ הֽוּא־שָֽׁם׃	6 הוֹלֵךְ֙ אֶל־דָּר֔וֹם וְסוֹבֵ֖ב אֶל־צָפ֑וֹן סוֹבֵ֤ב׀ סֹבֵב֙ הוֹלֵ֣ךְ הָר֔וּחַ וְעַל־סְבִיבֹתָ֖יו שָׁ֥ב הָרֽוּחַ׃
7 כָּל־הַנְּחָלִ֖ים הֹלְכִ֣ים אֶל־הַיָּ֑ם וְהַיָּ֣ם אֵינֶ֔נּוּ מָלֵ֔א אֶל־מְק֗וֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים֙ הֹלְכִ֔ים שָׁ֛ם הֵ֥ם שָׁבִ֖ים לָלָֽכֶת׃	8 כָּל־הַדְּבָרִ֖ים יְגֵעִ֑ים לֹא־יוּכַ֥ל אִ֛ישׁ לְדַבֵּ֖ר לֹא־תִשְׂבַּ֣ע עַ֔יִן לִרְא֑וֹת וְלֹא־תִמָּלֵ֥א אֹ֖זֶן מִשְּׁמֹֽעַ׃
9 מַה־שֶּׁהָיָ֔ה הֽוּא־שֶׁיִּהְיֶ֑ה וּמַה־שֶּׁנַּעֲשָׂ֔ה הֽוּא־שֶׁיֵּעָשֶׂ֑ה וְאֵ֥ין כָּל־חָדָ֖שׁ תַּ֥חַת הַשָּֽׁמֶשׁ׃	10 יֵ֣שׁ דָּבָ֔ר שֶׁיֹּאמַ֖ר רְאֵה־זֶ֣ה חָדָ֔שׁ הֽוּא כְּבָ֖ר הָיָ֣ה לְעֹלָמִ֑ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר הָיָ֖ה מִלְּפָנֵֽנוּ׃
11 אֵ֣ין זִכְר֔וֹן לָרִאשֹׁנִ֑ים וְגַם֙ לָאַחֲרֹנִ֔ים שֶׁיִּהְי֖וּ לֹא־יִהְיֶ֣ה לָהֶ֔ם זִכָּר֑וֹן עִם֙ שֶׁיִּהְי֖וּ לָאַחֲרֹנָֽה׃ פ	

Appendix C

DISTRIBUTION OF VERBAL FORMS IN QOHELETH



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